DUKE
UNIVERSITY

DIVINITY SCHOOL
LIBRARY

243

SELECT SERMONS,

TRANSLATED FROM THE

ORIGINAL FRENCH

OF

LOUIS BOURDALOUE.

HARLOW:
PRINTED BY B. FLOWER:
FOR T. CONDER, BUCKLERSBURY; VERNOR AND HOOD, POULTRY; M. JONES, PATERNOSTER-ROW, LONDON; AND J. DEIGHTON, CAMBRIDGE.

1806.

Div. S.
252.02
B768S

PREFACE.

FREQUENTLY as we hear the celebrated name of BOURDALOUE, the writings of that great man are probably unknown to the majority of english readers. It is hoped that this selection from his Sermons will be acceptable to many who may not wish to possess so large a work as the fifteen french volumes, as well as to them who from being unacquainted with the language in which these sermons are written, can obtain only the inferior pleasure of reading them in a translation.

When we consider the antichristian errors and innumerable absurdities of that system in which Bourdaloue was educated, we cannot too highly estimate the purity of his doctrines, and the practical nature of his exhortations. "The best sermons I "ever read," says Bishop Warburton, "were preach- "ed by one of the members of the worst church in

551458

"Christendom—the Romish; and of the worst sect "in that worst church—the Jesuits." In many of these sermons we meet with little which reminds us that *the Bible alone* was not the religion of the preacher; and even in those which tend directly to the support of Romish superstitions, we behold a spirit of sincere piety, and an invariable desire to promote the practice of virtue. In the compositions of a monk we naturally expect to find seclusion from the world represented as almost the only mean of salvation; the strict observance of religious rites, as the fulfilment of the divine laws; and the indulgence of wild, enthusiastic ardors, as the purest and most elevated piety: in the writings of Bourdaloue, on the contrary, active and social duties are clearly delineated and zealously enforced, nor is any argument used to seduce them into indolent retirement who are usefully employed in public life: and the performance of ceremonial religion, or the cultivation of abstract feelings, to the neglect of moral obligations and influential piety, is ever condemned as hypocrisy or self-delusion.

It is needless, however, to enlarge on the merit of these sermons; the selection contained in this volume will enable the reader to judge of the author's sentiments; although the difference of idiom in different languages would, in many cases, render it impossible for a more able translation than the present, to make them acquainted with the appropriate beauties of his style.

The translator has omitted a few passages in some of the discourses consisting chiefly of the peculiar sentiments of the church of Rome, but as they were not connected with the main arguments, it was considered unnecessary to interrupt the reader by acknowledging where the omissions were made.

The life of our author was congenial with his writings: — his piety was heartfelt; his virtue active and useful.

Louis Bourdaloue was born at Bourges, on August 20th. 1632. His family ranked amongst the most distinguished inhabitants of that city: at the age of fifteen he entered the community

551458

of the Jesuits. From that time, he passed eighteen years in the usual course of study, and in teaching philosophy and theology. In every pursuit, he evinced great capabilities and superiority of understanding.

Finding an equal facility in the acquirement of science and the composition of theological discourses, he was at first undecided with respect to the occupation which would render his talents most useful to mankind; but he was induced by the superiors of his Society to devote himself to preaching, in consequence of the applause bestowed on many of the sermons he delivered in the course of his theological instructions.

Bourdaloue was not permitted to continue many years in the country. Paris became the scene of his exertions and his popularity. He was endowed by nature with those advantages, without which the most eminent piety and superior abilities are sometimes confined to a very limited sphere of usefulness: his voice was sonorous, yet flexible and harmonious; his pronunciation im-

pressive and animated; his action suited to the energy of his feelings. From his first appearance in the capital, every sermon encreased his reputation; he was equally admired by the higher and the lower classes of society, by the learned and by the illiterate: yet this popularity was evidently obtained by talents and zeal; for Bourdaloue practised no dishonest arts to conciliate the favour of his hearers: to men of every rank he addressed the language of faithful reproof and earnest exhortation; ever in the midst of the court, (where he occasionally preached upwards of thirty years,) he strongly inculcated the most arduous duties of religion, condemned the idle pageantry of greatness, and the peculiar vices of his audience; and shewed that moral worth alone is estimable in the sight of God.—His faithfulness as a court preacher, was, if equalled, never surpassed.

Although Bourdaloue was much engaged in the labours of the pulpit, he devoted a large portion of time to the less public functions of his profession. He was indefatigable in visiting the sick, and paying the last services of piety and friendship to the dying.—He was likewise often em-

ployed during many hours successively in hearing confessions: and in this office he was doubtless actuated by the best motives: "any one who "was acquainted with him," says his biographer, "will be easily convinced that nothing but a con- "sideration of the will of God, and the salvation "of souls could render this patience compatible "with his natural vivacity." He was resorted to by numbers who were highly distinguished by rank and fortune, but the obscure and the indigent were equally the objects of his assiduous and benevolent attention. He banished, by his gentleness and condescension, the fears of them who awed by his celebrity and talents, timidly approached him; and his willing visits carried instruction and comfort to them who were confined to their wretched abodes.

Bourdaloue was not less esteemed as a companion than as a teacher of religion. With feelings naturally vivid, he was never dogmatical nor ungentle. His conversation was interesting; his deportment at once easy and dignified; his friendship unobtrusive, yet watchful and zealous.

Although Bourdaloue had preached at Paris four and thirty years, his popularity was still undiminished; but finding his health decline, he was desirous of forgoing his public labors, and spending the last days of his life in meditation and retirement. His repeated and urgent request for permission to quit the metropolis was, however, ineffectual: the Superiors of his Society considered it unjustifiable to deprive the public of abilities which were so usefully employed. Bourdaloue submitted to their decision, and continued his ministry with renewed zeal and diligence. But his exertions were soon to terminate: whilst the energy of his mind was unimpaired, he became every day more oppressed by corporeal infirmity. During several weeks he had suffered greatly from a cold, which at length produced a malignant fever. On Sunday, May the 11th, after he had performed the service of the day with extreme difficulty, his illness sensibly increased, and he felt that his last hour was approaching. He desired to be informed, without reserve, of the nature of his malady: the answer confirming his own pre-sentiment, he exclaimed, "Tis enough; I comprehend you: I must

" now practise that which I have so often recom-
" mended to others." His firmness of mind was unshaken by the contemplation of death: he acquiesced not only with humility, but with cheerfulness, in the will of Heaven.

The following morning he set his papers in order, and with perfect calmness prepared himself for the awful moment which was soon to arrive. In the latter part of the day, some favourable symptoms induced his friends to hope that his disorder would not prove fatal; but their hopes were soon changed to disappointment and grief. After a few hours, the fever returned with such violence that he became delirious; in which state he expired early the next morning, May 13, 1704.

He died in the seventy second year of his age. Till within two days of his death, he continued, without intermission, those labours of benevolence and piety, in which his heart was so much engaged, and in which so large a portion of his life was spent.

CONTENTS.

SERMON I.

On True and False Piety.

MAT. v. 18.

Page 1

SERMON II.

On the Love and Fear of Truth.

JOHN xvi. 13.

Page 33

SERMON III.

On the Afflictions of the Righteous and the Prosperity of the Wicked.

MATTHEW viii. 23, 24, 25, 26.

Page 65

SERMON IV.

On Prayer.

MATTHEW xv. 22.

Page 101

SERMON V.

On the Recompense of the Saints.

MATTHEW v. 12.

Page 135

SERMON VI.

On Love to our Neighbour.

LUKE x. 33, 34.

Page 167

SERMON VII.

On the Forgiveness of Injuries.

MATTHEW xviii. 32, 33, 34.

Page 202

SERMON VIII.

On Providence.

JOHN vi. 5, 6.

Page 235

SERMON IX.

On the Fear of Death.

LUKE vii. 12, 13

Page 263

SERMON X.

On the Prayer of Jesus Christ in the Garden.

MATTHEW xxvi. 39.

Page 297

SERMON XI.

On the last Judgment.

LUKE xxi. 27.

Page 324

SERMON I.

ON TRUE AND FALSE PIETY.

MATTHEW V. 20.

For I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of Heaven.

SUCH is the high opinion which Jesus Christ teaches us to form of the purity of the christian law. You know, my dear hearers, what the Pharisees were amongst the Jews: they were men of solitary and retired habits, who withdrew from the multitude, and detached themselves from the commerce of the world; men who were regarded as saints, equally revered by the rich and the poor, and whose exemplary lives at once excited the admiration and improved the morals of the public: but strange as it may seem, notwithstanding their sanctity, the Son of God declares in his gospel, that if our righteousness shall not exceed the righteousness of these devotees of the synagogue, we shall not be received into the kingdom of heaven; that the most eminent of their virtues did not raise them to the lowest degree of christian perfection; and that to rise merely to their level would not be

performing our duties or fulfilling our vocation.* This assertion of the Son of God, seems calculated to discourage our hopes, and lead us to despair; but this, my brethren, was not the intention of the Saviour of the world: when he pronounces his decrees, they are meant to inform, not to destroy us; when he speaks, it is as our master, not as our judge; and when he directs our attention to the conduct of the Pharisees, it is only to point out, and teach us to avoid, the vices which may debase a character apparently exalted by devotion. This is a subject of infinite importance; and perhaps of all the subjects which it is my duty to discuss, and which I have ever selected for discussion, no one is so highly moral and beneficial. We are all placed on the earth that we may serve the Almighty: to his service is attached our salvation, and our eternal happiness or misery: but we meet with stumbling-blocks from which we are in danger, in this service; how important is it then that we should be fully aware of them, to preserve ourselves in safety.

As the most brilliant gold is not always the most free from alloy; so the most splendid piety is not always the most solid and pure. Can we desire a

* This declaration of our Saviour, must have greatly surprised his hearers, as it was a common proverb among the Jews, that "if but "*two men* were to enter into the kingdom of heaven, one of them "would be a *Scribe*, and the other a *Pharisee*." Ed.

more striking exemplification of this truth, than in the Scribes and Pharisees? Their actions apparently so holy, were not only worthless in the sight of God, but they were actions which he expressly condemned. What were the causes of this condemnation? Three great imperfections we may discover in them, and which I shall endeavour to expose in the three heads of this discourse. In short, what was the piety of the Pharisees? It was hypocritical, false and vicious; first in its subject, secondly in its aim, thirdly in its form. False in its subject, because it affected the most scrupulous severity in things of a trivial nature, whilst it neglected the most important duties: false in its aim, because all its exertions were selfish, and arose from worldly considerations; lastly, false in its form, because it was merely external, and consisted in outward performances: for these reasons it was so strongly opposed, and so frequently reprobated by the Son of God. If we, my brethren, are desirous, by sincere and genuine piety, to ensure our salvation and render ourselves acceptable to God, let us learn to correct in the practice of our religion, these three defects; that is to say, let our piety be perfect; let our piety be disinterested; and let our piety be internal: perfect, that it may comprehend every thing which enters into the service of God, whether of more or less importance; disinterested, that it may have a view to God and

his kingdom, without considering what we might expect to receive from the world; internal, that it may influence and dwell in the heart. Unless by these distinguishing marks, we prove ourselves superior to the Pharisees; unless our piety be more extensive, and actuated by a nobler aim than theirs, and unless it be deeply rooted in our hearts, we must not flatter ourselves that we shall ever find favour with God: *except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of Heaven.* Grant me your attention whilst I pursue this subject.

PART I.

I. It would not be surprising, christians, to find a species of piety, deficient in the performance of trivial duties, and at the same time prompt in the accomplishment of those which are more important: this deficiency would be the effect of a frailty so natural to us, that it appears in some degree excusable. But piety characterized by the most scrupulous attention to things of little consequence, yet neglectful of the weightier matters of the law, is the most palpable of all illusions; a mistake arising from the greatest derangement of the understanding. For of what avail is that zeal which attaches itself to trifles, whilst the plainest commands of the Almighty are violated? By doing

all that is enjoined, we evince a fidelity which is acceptable to God, since we are willing to obey his commands; but by performing actions that are comparatively useless, to the neglect of his precepts, we waste our time in unprofitable labour, and even become guilty in the sight of God; for we transgress his adorable will to reach after imaginary perfection.

Yet, my dear hearers, this is one of the most common errors which reigns in the world; I mean in the christian world; and it was this evident and highly reprehensible defect which the Son of God condemned in the Pharisees. Consider the nature of it in those jewish sages, that you may be enabled to avoid it yourselves. *Woe unto you Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites*, exclaimed the Saviour of men; all your piety consists in performing certain rites, and in paying certain tithes, which are not ordained in the law, and with which you might entirely dispense, whilst you forget the most important duties: *ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith.* The law commands you to be equitable in your judgments; and every day you commit the most flagrant injustice: the law commands you to be sincere in the intercourse of life; and you are full of artifice and dissimulation; the law instructs you to be charitable, gentle and patient to your neigh-

bour; and you censure the slightest failings with excessive rigour, and without the least compassion for human infirmity. *Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.* Thus did the Son of God address them; for this was ever the vice of the Pharisees. They were superstitiously observant of the Sabbath day; but on the Sabbath day they would conspire against Jesus Christ for his destruction. They considered it criminal of the apostles to omit washing their hands before they ate; but at the same time they violated the most sacred and indispensable law of nature, that of honouring their parents: they taught children to treat their father and mother with contempt and ingratitude, and to refuse them needful assistance. When they were required to enter the judgment-hall of Pilate, where the deliverer of Israel, the holiest of the holy, was to be examined and judged on their accusation, they refused to go in because it was the day before the passover; a day in which the Jews could not approach a heathen without contracting a sort of impurity, which prevented them from eating the paschal lamb. Their consciences were, doubtless, very tender; they were afraid of being defiled by entering Pilate's house; yet they were not afraid of being defiled by committing the most sacrilegious, the direst of crimes: they durst not be seen in the house of a heathen judge; but they had courage enough to persecute and oppress the innocent, to bring false

witnesses against him, and to shed his blood on the cross.

Is not this, christians, a striking representation of the piety of modern times? We must not consider the pharisaical religion as a phantom which has disappeared since the christian revelation; this religion still exists, and exists even among the professors of christianity; even in the bosom of the church. Do you require proof? You need only look at what is daily passing around you. You see a man who has regular times appointed for prayer, for reading religious books, and for other pious exercises: such is the course he has prescribed for himself; and he is so much attached to it, that the most important concerns in the world would not induce him to depart from a single rule he had laid down: but listen to his conversation; it is full of satire and calumny: with an affectation of virtue and piety, he will condemn one, reveal the most secret actions of another, include all in his censure, and, as if he had been sent by heaven to effect a general reform, make a solemn protest against the whole human race. Observe his conduct when he imagines himself injured; he will demand the most unbounded reparation, and scarcely can any thing atone for the offence. He will consider his own cause as the cause of God; or at any rate, it will be impossible ever to convince him that he is in any degree blameable, and

that justice is not altogether on his side : from this prejudice he will feel himself authorized to cherish in his heart the most bitter resentment, and to defend the most unjust and cruel vengeance.

Consider the character of that woman : she is the first in all religious assemblies ; she addicts herself to frequent meditation ; she aspires to the most elevated devotion ; she would deem herself unpardonable for deviating in any instance from a certain method which she invariably pursues : but oppose her on any occasion, you will find her fierce, haughty, impatient, and morose ; taking advantage of her regular life and precise manners, to arrogate the right of doing every thing according to her own inclination. Gain admittance into her family, and then observe her deportment : she is neither courteous to her husband, affectionate to her children, nor watchful over her servants. Every one suffers from her caprice, and alternately endures her ill humour. Provided she has passed some portion of the day before the altar, and been present at certain religious ceremonies, all the affairs of her house may be in confusion, yet scarcely attract her notice.

If I wished to extend my remarks, what might I not say of every condition of life. Is there any one which would not furnish me with evident and frequent instances of such frivolous and mistaken

piety? Do not even the ministers of the Lord, who ought to serve as examples to lead the people in his ways, sometimes fall into this fatal error? How many have we seen ardently zealous in maintaining, or re-establishing the discipline of the church, who are nevertheless ready to make divisions in the church, to give offence, and to cherish a spirit of faction? On such occasions, what can I do, my dear hearers, but repeat the anathema pronounced by Jesus Christ; *Woe unto you:* not only to you Scribes and Pharisees, but to you christians, unworthy of the name you bear, and the religion you profess! Woe, not only unto you who live in open licentiousness, and abandon yourselves without reserve to the corruption of the world, but to you who, being by your profession devoted to the service of God, are desirous of rising to the sublimest heights of piety, whilst you neglect the very foundation.

What is the foundation of christian piety, of the piety which Jesus Christ himself has inculcated! The example of the young man in the gospel, (*Mat.* xix.) will inform us. He appeared to be influenced by religious feelings, and anxious to become holy, and to *work out* his *salvation;* he therefore went to consult that divine teacher, to whom many resorted from all parts, to hear from his lips the words of eternal truth: and how did the son of God first address him? Did he pro-

pose an utter renunciation of all that he possessed? Did he explain to him the mysterious operations of divine grace? Did he discourse on the efficacy of extatic devotion? No, my dear hearers: *keep the commandments,* was his injunction: this above all, is what you are to perform; and unless your religion be founded on obedience, it is a house built on the sand, which will fall, and overwhelm you in its ruins.

We may then adopt the language of the great apostle: *Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal: and though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing: and though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.* And how can we possess this charity, if we omit what is strictly commanded by the law of God? The apostle proceeds to describe the charity he had been so highly extolling. *Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all*

things, endureth all things. Hence it follows, that if I cannot moderate my feelings in a dispute, and, according to the scriptural expression, *in patience possess my soul;* if I have not that gentleness which is needful to maintain peace in a family or neighbourhood; if instead of a disposition to oblige and give pleasure to all, I encourage a secret envy of one, and a declared antipathy to another; if I am ready to harbour suspicions and prejudices hurtful to the character of those with whom I live, or who are under my authority; if, regarding the inspiration of blind zeal as the dictate of justice, I secretly endeavour to grieve, oppose, and humble a fellow creature, and if his distress with which I ought to sympathize, is a subject of rejoicing to me, it is in vain that I multiply acts of devotion, and repeat prayer after prayer; all my piety vanishes away like smoke, and is as nothing in the sight of God.

But ought we then to omit every pious action which is not commanded in express terms? Ah! christians, such is our blindness! we are ever prone to vicious extremes, and to avoid the middle course in which virtue consists. Restricting our piety to the fulfilment of express commands, and omittingthose generous acts which flow from christian zeal, is another mistake, injurious to God, hurtful to ourselves, and extremely dangerous in its consequence; for the neglect of small things, soon leads

us to neglect those of more importance. What, then, is requisite to true piety? The union of one with the other; that perfection of obedience which embraces the whole will of God. Such is the example that Jesus Christ, our Saviour and our model, has given us. John, his divine precursor, when his master presented himself to receive his baptism, overcome with surprise at his humility, refused to baptize him: *suffer it to be so now*, replied our Lord; *for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.* Again: the son of God proposed his own conduct as the subject of our instruction and imitation, when he told the Jews, that he was *not come to destroy the law but to fulfil it:* and afterwards explaining what it was to fulfil the law, he adds, that *one jot or one tittle should in no wise pass, till all was fulfilled.* He has given us an excellent rule in a few words, which from its brevity forms a sort of abstract of christian duty: *These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.* Because this is commanded, you ought to do it first, and in preference to every thing else; and the other you ought to perform from a holy and zealous wish to please your God, and to advance in the path of holiness. If it were necessary to choose which you should do, the first would incontestably claim the preference; but one is perfectly consistent with the other, and true piety effects this surprising union.--Piety that is *perfect with respect to its extent;* and likewise *disinterested in*

its aim;—another point in which it is superior to the piety of the Pharisees, as we shall see under our second head.

PART II.

II. Of all the passions, not one is more general, nor more deeply rooted in the heart of man than selfishness. Selfishness is an universal passion, which mixes with all the rest and gives them form and activity. Who knows not the extent of self-love, and the manner in which it insinuates itself into every thing? Under what pretence does the vindictive man pursue his enemy with violence, and attempt his destruction?--That of satisfying his revenge. This I consider the effect of selfishness: and it is the same with the libertine, the voluptuary, and all the other descriptions of vicious men: but, christians, we cannot feel sufficient regret, on the consideration that our piety itself has not been proof against the influence of selfishness, and that this vice continually debases all that is most pure and holy in christianity.

Selfishness was the predominant passion of the Pharisees; and according to the testimony of the evangelists, their religion and good works had two principal objects in view: they were desirous of acquiring honour; and notwithstanding their affected austerity, they wished to be abundantly

supplied with all that could contribute to the ease and pleasure of life. They aspired after a state of affluence, and an absolute dominion over the minds of others: and what did they do in order to attain these objects? They made choice of a state of retirement; they passed whole days and even nights in the temple: they spent the greater part of their time at the altar, in singing the praises of God, or in addressing him in numberless petitions; they expressed nothing but penitence and humiliation; they talked of nothing but abstinence and fasting; they condemned every thing they saw, and perpetually mourned over the depravity of the age. The consequence was, what has too frequently happened since that time; that the multitude, credulous and easily seduced by appearances, conceived the highest veneration for them. A great number of pious women, influenced by good motives, but from a weakness too common to their sex, led to estimate devotion by its apparent austerity, and prepossessed with ideas which simple minds are equally ready to admit, and unwilling to resign, declared themselves favourers of their cause, and invested them at the same time with the care of their souls, and the management of their property; enriching them at their own expence, and exhausting themselves for their support: they imagined they were making a sacrifice to God, when, by ample contributions, they enabled men so holy, so great, so perfect, to devote

themselves to his service: of this we are informed by the Evangelist. Nor is this all: the general prepossession in their favour produced another effect not less advantageous, nor less conformable to the ambition of these haughty devotees; for thereby they acquired a reputation which gave them authority on every occasion: they governed and directed the affairs of whole families, and peremptorily interposed in every conversation: in the synagogue, on public occasions, and in public places, they were treated with profound respect, and with all those marks of distinction after which they aspired, and which highly flattered their vanity. All this they derived from their reputation for piety; and this, as the son of God told them, was the reward of their prayers; their frequent, their protracted, their selfish prayers.

Amongst every species of false piety, there is none so contemptible as this selfish, mercenary piety: it is equally criminal in the sight of God, who penetrates the most secret recesses of the heart; and odious in the sight of men, when they are able to perceive its nature, and draw aside the veil that conceals its deformity. This kind of false piety is, I have said, the most criminal and hateful in the sight of God; for it is most profane and sacrilegious thus to misapply, not only holy things, but holiness itself. Had we carried the vessels out of the temple and defiled them, as the king of Babylon

formerly did, we should have been guilty of a crime worthy of severe punishment: why? Because those vessels were holy. But what was the holiness of those vessels, compared with that holiness which is, or ought to be found in our hearts? The vessels were not in themselves holy; they had merely a relative, and, if I may so express myself, metaphorical holiness: but that which dwells in our bosoms is absolute holiness, the source of all other holiness, the very unction of divine grace. Judge then what is your guilt in the eyes of God, when you debase this holiness by worldly views; when you employ it to gratify your avarice or ambition; when by an unnatural union, you attempt to join together religion and cupidity: religion, which of all things is the most estimable, the most pure, and cupidity, which is altogether earthly and gross.

Salvien declares, he could not imagine a greater affront to the Almighty. To serve the world, said this prelate, for the sake of God is virtuous; to serve the world for its own sake is wrong; but serving God for the sake of the world, is it not the most signal outrage we can commit against that great Being? Such is the insult offered to him by a selfish piety, in which interest is our only object; and God considered only a mean by which it is to be advanced; therefore, as the means are not promoted by the object, but the object by the means,

instead of serving God by piety of this nature, we require God to serve us; to serve the cause of our avarice, of our luxuriousness, of our vanity and pride, as he justly complains by the Prophet Isaiah: *thou hast made me to serve with thy sins.*

False piety is not only criminal in the sight of God, but hateful in the sight of men. It excites detestation on whatever occasion it is perceived; nor is this strange, since nothing is more dangerous, nor more to be feared than devotion debased, and guided by selfishness. A selfish devotee is capable of every folly; because in the first place, he covers the greatest defects, sometimes even the greatest crimes, with an appearance of piety; an appearance which deceives himself, and which he would be very unwilling to see in a true point of view. Secondly, he is capable of every folly; because his piety, or rather because the esteem attracted by his ostentatious piety, enables him to succeed in every undertaking that passion may suggest. Has he formed some project of revenge? No one will resist him. Is he resolved to supplant an adversary? He is all powerful. Is he disposed to blast the reputation of his neighbour? His testimony alone will overwhelm the innocent with disgrace. And is it not by the help of false piety (I speak without apprehension, since it is not my design to bring true religion into discredit, God forbid that it should; but strongly to repro-

bate the abuses which in every period have crept into it,) is it not by the help of false piety, that the weakest persons have raised themselves to the most elevated ranks; men the least deserving to be favoured and recommended, have obtained the greatest favour and recommendation; and without any merit except the pretence of being reformers, have been preferred to all their competitors, and intruded themselves into the highest offices? Is there any thing more repugnant to our natural feelings; more calculated to excite disgust and indignation?

Let us not deceive ourselves, my brethren; it is selfishness which has been the reproach of religion in all ages, and which has disgraced it, if I may so speak, in the world. It is the discovery of this vice amongst the most revered characters, which has rendered the ungodly so eloquent in their censures. They have observed, that men who were thought pre-eminently pious, had entered the church from interested motives, for the sake of obtaining an honourable establishment, or rising to situations of dignity and splendour; like those mentioned by the Psalmist, *who said, let us take to ourselves the houses of God in possession.* They engage in the sacred office for the aggrandizement of their families, and esteem their employment only in proportion to its revenue and profits. The avarice which is so apparent in some ecclesiastics,

their eagerness to reap temporal, where they have sown spiritual blessings; their care to proportion their labours to the emolument they may derive; the ardent and restless desire of others to obtain power; constituting themselves sovereigns, and seeking honours, whilst they profess to be entirely devoted to the care of souls:—these, my brethren, are subjects of reproach, of which the enemies of the church have availed themselves, in order to triumph over us. And even at the present time, what idea do men of the world form of religion; and in what way do they talk of it? Prejudiced by the various instances they have remarked to its disadvantage, and from these instances forming a general opinion, they imagine that pious persons have always a sinister motive for their piety; that one is endeavouring to insinuate himself into the good opinion of some great man; that another is providing a support which he apprehends will be needful; that a third is bent on the acquirement of power and authority; that a fourth has other objects of pursuit, still more criminal. Such is their judgment, and you know with what contempt it is avowed; so that, from our lamentable degeneracy, that which ought to be an honour is turned into a reproach; and the term a pious man, or a pious woman, which in its true signification expresses all that is venerable in christianity, is often considered a disgraceful appellation.

From reflections like these, the Son of God, when he sent his apostles to preach the gospel, enjoined them to act in the most disinterested manner, forbidding them to take two coats on their journey, or any fund for their subsistence; or to aspire after honour, dignity, and precedency, in the christian church; explaining to them that true greatness consists in the most profound humility: *he that is greatest among you*, said he, *let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve.* The apostles, obeying the divine instructions of their adorable master, were particularly cautious, in the exercise of their ministry, to avoid all appearance of selfishness; convinced that without such caution, they would be unable to benefit souls; and that from the moment their auditors should perceive any interested motive for their apostolic labours, their confidence would be destroyed, and they would refuse to hear their exhortations. For this reason St. Paul in particular when writing to the Corinthians, took so much pains to prove the disinterestedness which divested him of all worldly views in his apostleship. My brethren, said he, examine our conduct, observe our condition, and judge whether we are actuated by vain glory, or the hope of temporal advantage: we instruct you in the faith, and according to the faith we are your fathers in Christ Jesus; but in the opinion of the world, we are the meanest of men. You are christians; you, nevertheless,

are placed in offices, and remain in stations, which confer distinction: but we, we are nothing: *we are weak, but ye are strong, ye are honourable, but we are despised. Even unto this present hour we both hunger and thirst, and are naked, and are buffetted, and have no certain dwelling place; and labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the earth, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day.* The holy apostle concludes by asserting, that he wrote not these things to reproach or shame them, but to prove, that in labouring amongst them, all his labours were intended for their advantage, and not for his own.

Thus spake the apostle of the gentiles, and what effect might not be produced by his perfect disinterestedness? Christians, let us imitate his temper, then will all men acknowledge the reality of our religion, and honour our sincerity. But without regarding the judgment of the world, let us consider that we shall then be holy in the sight of God; our prayers will rise up before his throne as fragrant incense, pure and acceptable unto him. Happy the man, who in his religion seeks God, and God alone! Observe both these characteristicks, he seeks God, and God alone: he is, if I may use the expression, doubly sealed with *the seal of the living God.* Not to seek God shews

an indifference towards him, which is the greatest outrage. And how can he accept us, unless we offer ourselves to him? The pursuit of any other object, in conjunction with God, is a division which offends him, for, as you have been repeatedly told, the God we serve, (or ought to serve,) is a jealous God; and in a heart like ours, wholly formed by his hand, will admit no competitor: this he has declared in both the old and the new testament: he has told us by his prophets, that he is too great to dwell in a divided heart; and by the mouth of his Son, our Saviour, he has expressly said; *no man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.* Whom, Lord, can we wish to serve but thee? What interest can we have but that of finding and possessing thee? In seeking thee, and thee only, we have no disappointment to fear; we shall find our God; we shall possess him to all eternity. Art not thou enough to satisfy all our desires; and after what other object can our hearts aspire? We will then repeat the words of the Psalmist, and with the spirit in which he uttered them: *whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.* What can heaven and earth present me with more dear to me than my God, or so dear to me as my God? Thou, my God, shalt henceforth be all my treasure, and all my glory!

It remains, my brethren, to be shewn, that your piety ought to be *internal*, instead of resembling that of the Pharisees, which consisted merely in outward form. This is the subject of our third head.

PART III.

III. It was a question agitated by the fathers of the church; why God, having judged men individually at their death, will re-judge them at the end of the world.—They have given various answers: the most satisfactory, in my opinion, is, that God designs by this universal judgment, to make manifest the principles and the conduct of every man. In the present state, the generality are in appearance entirely the reverse of their true characters: the righteous, from their humility, frequently appear like sinners, and sinners by their hypocrisy, counterfeit the piety of the righteous; by which means the good are, on numberless occasions condemned, whilst the wicked are justified and approved. It is just, that divine providence should rectify these disorders, and for which purpose the Almighty has appointed a general judgment, in which the secrets of every heart will be revealed, and the virtuous or vicious state of each character be made manifest. *Son of man*, said the Lord to Ezekiel, *(Chap.* 8.) *Seest thou what they do?* Knowest thou what my people do; art thou thoroughly acquainted with their hearts? No:

thou canst not know, for thou seest only the outward appearance. *But turn thee yet again, and thou shalt see greater abominations.* Approach still nearer; pierce this wall, and thou shalt see all the abominations it conceals: thou believest that this people honour me, because, in the humble posture of suppliants, they place their sacrifices on mine altar; but I say unto thee, these are sacrifices which I reject. Yet, Lord, might the Prophet reply, they are such as thou hast ordained.—No! the sacrifices that I command are those of the heart; real sacrifices, offered by sincere piety: but all the religion of my people, is only an outward form which strikes the eye; they appear zealous for me, whilst they possess only an image and vain shew of zeal.

This, my dear hearers, is the last feature which the Son of God has described in the false piety of the Pharisees: a superficial piety, resting on the lips, and in the countenance, whilst the heart is untouched. To what did the Saviour of the world compare these men? To painted sepulchres. If we contemplate only the exterior, all is beautiful; but when we open them and look within, we find nothing but corruption and death. This comparison, as St. Chrysostom remarks, is highly natural and proper; for mere external holiness is but a lifeless form of piety, a body without a soul, fit only to be hidden in the grave. In short, what is it

that God requires of man? His heart; and except the heart, what is there in man that is worthy of God? It is then in the heart that this living piety of the good man resides, since it is by the heart that he becomes acceptable to God; with the heart that he loves God, and renders himself worthy of his love. Take from him this life of the heart, and all the rest, in a spiritual sense, is dead, as in the order of nature, the whole body expires when the heart ceases to beat.

Hence the Almighty, when remonstrating by his prophets, against the infidelity of the Jews, complains that their hearts are far from him, that they have estranged their hearts from him, that their hearts are hardened against him. Hence, David, in describing the character of the righteous, and the sinner, particularly marks this essential difference; that the heart of the righteous is upright, that he serves God with his whole heart, that the law of God is written in his heart: but that the wicked man has a vain, a corrupt heart; that his heart is rebellious against God; that he has *said in his heart there is no God.* The royal prophet, in his frequent and earnest addresses to the Almighty, exclaims; *examine me, O Lord, and prove me; try my reins and my heart.—Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.* Sometimes, he animates himself to bless and praise the Lord, with his *whole heart;*

or in words expressive of the disposition of his mind, calls him the God of his heart. In fact, I must repeat almost the whole of the sacred writings, were I to notice every expression that recommends the devotion of the heart.

If this heartfelt zeal and affection was a requisite of true piety under the law, how much more indispensable is it, my brethren, in the gospel, since one of the principal objects of the mission of Jesus Christ, was to instruct us in spiritual worship; and such alone he declares is the true worship. *But the hour cometh and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeketh such to worship him.* We may, then conclude, that all others are but false worshippers, and that all worship, in whatsoever it may consist, which proceeds not from the heart, is but false worship. I do not assert that external worship, is in itself blameable; I do not say it is absolutely useless, nor that we are authorized to neglect it. I know that there are prayers and religious rites, instituted for the glory of God, and that in them we are required, and enabled to glorify him. But I assert, that the Almighty never considers himself honoured by these things, unless they proceed from the heart: that without this spiritual worship, this turning of the heart to God, he will not accept them, because they contain nothing suitable to his being and

attributes: for, to repeat the convincing reason given by our Saviour, *God is a spirit;* consequently the worship that is suitable to his nature, is spiritual: *they that worship him, must worship him in spirit.* It is evident then, that if we neglect to render him the adoration of the heart, whatever we may do besides, we no longer honour him in truth, but only in appearance. God will not rest satisfied with outward worship; *he is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.*

Believing this my dear hearers, what ought we to think of many things which we practise, or witness among christians, and what good effects can we expect from them? Of what value can they be in the sight of God? I am not now speaking of those works which proceed merely from ostentation or selfishness: it is certain that if *they* procure any reward, it will not be from God, who regards them as crimes. I am speaking of those actions which are performed without design, without seriousness or reflection; performed from habit, from convenience, from the requirements of our office, or from worldly motives. These are actions still more common, and we perceive them even in the holiest callings. Reflect seriously on this subject. We repeat devotional compositions, replete with the noblest sentiments of faith, hope, benevolence, and piety; of confidence in God and submission to his will: but perhaps, after we have been thus

employed during whole hours, we have not for one moment been influenced by faith, hope, charity, confidence, or submission. And why? It is, that by all our lips pronounced our hearts were untouched. We appear before the altar of the Lord, and prostrate ourselves with apparent humility; and possibly in all the time we have professed to spend in devotion, we have not performed one act of religious worship; we have not once lifted our hearts to our great Creator; nor felt that religion consists not in the attitude of the body, or the humility of the countenance, but in lowliness of heart. Others may visit hospitals and prisons, console the afflicted, relieve the sick, assist the poor; and, it may be, that those who on such occasions, shew the greatest assiduity and zeal, are in reality the least influenced by christian charity; but are actuated by natural activity, affected by instinctive compassion, or led by habit: the will of God is not the principle which directs them.

This is a great and important lesson for us who are ministers of Jesus Christ; suffer me now to apply it, though more for my own confusion, than for your profit. Called to the sacred office, and in a peculiar manner devoted to the service of God, how many religious exercises, and acts of piety are we required to perform? What honour, and above all, what sanctity is attached to the performance of these duties! But here, my

brethren, what a subject of fear and humiliation! Is there not too much reason to apprehend, that the sanctity is in the office, and not in the ministers! By familiarising ourselves, as it were, with holy things, we frequently suffer their spirit to escape us, and our hearts no longer take any interest in them; and whilst those who listen to us are affected by divine truth, we treat it with as much indifference and coldness as if it were wholly unimportant.

And what is the consequence? We fall into two kinds of hypocrisy, which are not, I allow, absolute and deliberate deceptions, but at the same time they are highly detrimental:—hypocrisy with respect to the public, and hypocrisy with respect to ourselves: that is to say, without an express intention of doing it, we too frequently deceive the public, and deceive ourselves. We deceive the public, because that exterior of devotion with which we adorn ourselves is, in its own nature, and when properly employed, only the symbol of the inward devotion of the heart. It is the branches, the leaves, the flowers, which are visible, but which indicate a root, concealed in the bosom of the earth. If, then, you have only these flowers, these leaves and these branches, without the root; if you have only the shadow, whilst the substance is wanting, your appearance is deceitful, because it indicates what does not

exist. A man of this description passes for a saint: he is judged according to his apparent character, and regarded as a model of virtue; yet what is his virtue but a false splendour, a specious phantom, which has nothing in it solid or real? Ah! my brother, said St. Chrysostom, be what you appear, or cease to appear what you are not.

But it is still more lamentable and awful that we deceive ourselves. We consider our lives entirely conformable to the precepts of christianity, as in fact they appear; we regard as precious in the sight of God, all the good works we perform, or imagine we perform, without reflecting that they are no longer good than whilst they proceed from the right principle, and the only principle which can render them excellent. We willingly listen to commendation, we hear it with delight, persuading ourselves without difficulty, that it is well founded; and we give way to reflections on our conduct which cherish the delusion. We say, like that self deceiver in the Revelations; *I am rich;* or at least, we believe that we are working to augment our riches, and that our treasure in heaven is daily increasing. How blind are we! instead of the abundance of which we think ourselves possessed, we know not that we are in poverty and misery. We believe that we *have need of nothing;* but we are like sleeping men, who, in their dreams, imagine they are grasping immense

riches, and on awakening, find themselves divested of all. If it were possible that the Almighty himself should be deceived; if his eyes could not penetrate the brilliant surface which dazzles us, we should be in a less pitiable state; but he sees what is hidden from us. Ah! christians, when we appear before the tribunal of our sovereign Judge, to render an account, not only of our crimes and sinful habits, but likewise of our virtues, how will he then act? Will he pronounce our eternal doom from viewing our exterior conduct? Has he not threatened by his prophets and apostles, that he will examine every secret thought, design, and wish; that he *will search Jerusalem;* that he *will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts?* that he will weigh us in the balances of the sanctuary, and condemn us, if we are *found wanting?* How many false prophets will advance to claim the crown of glory, to whom he will reply; *I never knew you.* They have *prophesied;* they have *done many wonderful works;* they have gained the esteem, admiration and confidence of the people by their eloquent discourses, their specious acts of piety, their charitable institutions: they have been spoken of and extolled in the world; whole provinces, whole kingdoms have resounded with their names: but they will be disowned by the Almighty; for their piety has been equally specious

and unreal; and at *the day of the Lord* it will disappear, so that not a vestige will remain which he will deign to notice.

Let us then, my brethren, form more equitable ideas; and let us follow the apostle's advice: *whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.* The ark of the Lord was of *pure gold within and without;* an emblem of what we ought to be. If we rest contented, like the Pharisees, with purifying the outside of the vessel, and neglect the rest, we expose ourselves to the malediction they incurred. Let us offer the sacrifice of Abel, not the sacrifice of Cain: Abel offered the best of his possesions, and Cain the least valuable of his: the Lord accepted the offering of the one, and held that of the other in abhorrence.

If we would unequivocally devote ourselves to God, we must offer to him that which is most excellent, most noble in ourselves, that is, the *heart*. Let this offering be our first, our continual, our last act of devotion; for true piety consists not in outward form: the heart alone is *a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing to God.*

SERMON II.

ON THE LOVE AND FEAR OF TRUTH.

JOHN xvi. 13.

Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth.

AS perfect truth is one of the most distinguishing attributes of the Holy Spirit, so, my brethren, it is one of his most distinguishing offices to guide us into *all truth*. Not that he instructs us immediately, as he instructed the apostles when he descended upon them in a visible form; but he has instruments by which he communicates instruction; enlightened ministers, who address the world in his name, and like the inspired prophets of old, proclaim divine truth to all ranks and degrees, to princes and people. These ministers are but men, sinful men, subject to all the miseries and infirmities of those to whom they speak. On this account the libertines of the age are furnished with a plausible excuse. They profess to be desirous of learning the truth, from men, who, with much zeal, practise the rules they enforce on others;

from men irreproachable in their conduct; as if our reception of the truth ought to depend on the merit and qualifications of him who promulgates it. But as St. Chrysostom has remarked, this is a pretext of which libertinism would avail itself, in order to conceal its guilt; for were it possible to meet with men of perfect characters, men exempt from all human infirmity, yet their testimony would not be received; since Jesus Christ himself, when he appeared on earth, was far from gaining the credit due to the divine truths which he taught. It is my present design, my dear hearers, to describe our proper conduct with respect to truth, and to point out and endeavour to correct our criminal abuse of it. Let us supplicate the Spirit of truth to enlighten our minds.

If we attentively consider the feelings of the human heart, we shall probably find that they are on no subject so ambiguous and contradictory as on that of truth: for a man loves truth, and yet hates it; he seeks, yet avoids it; he considers it a cause of joy, and a cause of grief: at one time he listens to it with pleasure; at another, he stubbornly resists its influence: at first he triumphs in having attained it; afterwards he would for ever banish it from his mind. Sometimes he regards it as a duty to yield to its dominion, and sometimes he considers it his torment. What can be so apparently inconsistent as sentiments and conduct of

so opposite a nature? To reconcile these contradictions, my brethren, I observe, that there are truths which have a different tendency with respect to ourselves, and on the application of which depends the virtue or depravity of our lives: there is truth that reproves, and truth that flatters; truth which reproves, which shews us all that is defective and vicious in our characters; and truth which flatters, and which discovers all the good qualities we possess. Hence we may, I think, easily account for the contrary feelings which appear to divide the heart of man. For if we love truth, it is the truth that flatters; and if we hate truth, it is that which reproves. It is my intention to shew you that in both these instances we are wrong; and, *that of all truth we ought most to esteem that which reproves*:—this will form the first part of my subject. In the second part I shall endeavour to prove, *that the truth we ought most to fear is that which flatters.*

PART I.

I. It is not a paradox, my brethren, but a maxim which has always appeared incontestible to the teachers of morality, that no truth is so worthy of our love as that which reproves. What, it has been asked, is more calculated for our advantage than the knowledge of that which makes us ac-

quainted with our own characters; that which has sovereign virtue to correct and perfect them? What more beneficial than to know that which persons, in general, are most studious to conceal from us; that, in short, which it is of all things most difficult to ascertain, and of which no one will undertake to inform us, but from a zeal, arising from an ardent desire for our welfare, not only sincere, but in the highest degree generous. We shall find that the greatest advantage results from that truth which discovers to us our faults.

First. It makes us acquainted with ourselves: without its assistance we cannot hope to understand our own characters; and next to the knowledge of God, we should desire nothing so earnestly as the knowledge of ourselves. St. Augustine even doubted whether it were not as essential to acquire the knowledge of ourselves as the knowledge of God; because, strictly speaking, these two kinds of knowledge are inseparable in the order of grace, and one necessarily dependent on the other. Why, christians, is it impossible to know myself without loving the truth which reproves? Because it is certain that however careful I may be to regulate my conduct, and whatever the testimony of my conscience may be on that subject, still I am liable to numberless mistakes and weaknesses, which although evident to others, escape my own observation: were I not convinced of this,

I should be under the most pernicious delusion, for I should be in an error with respect to my error, and ignorant even of my ignorance. Besides, I ought to know that if I were continually examining my own heart, I should never have sufficient penetration to discover all my defects and weaknesses, because self love is an impenetrable veil which conceals part of my character, and prevents me from clearly viewing the rest. I must then entirely renounce the hope of knowing myself, or supply the defects of my own observation, by the opinion others have formed of me : and as there are many truths calculated to mortify and humble me, I must be willing to hear them from others, since I am not enlightened enough to discover them myself.

Ought not each of us, my brethren, to cultivate a disposition like this? A sick man, when he meets with a physician who perfectly describes his malady, far from being offended, esteems and honours his sincerity ; estimating more highly the service rendered him, in proportion to the painfulness of his disease, and the difficulty of ascertaining its nature. If we are thus disposed with regard to bodily disorders, what sentiments ought we to cherish with respect to the diseases of the mind, our imperfections and vices? We must turn, (shall I say it, christians?)—We must turn to paganism for examples. In the bosom of

idolatry, men have existed who were as intent on discovering their faults, as we are on avoiding the knowledge of ours. Germanicus, a young nobleman of the court, and even of the household of Augustus, and chief of the Roman army, actuated by the laudable desire of self-knowledge, a desire most unusual among the great, occasionally disguised himself, and at night secretly approached the soldiers' tents, and listened to their conversation; knowing that to be the time in which they would speak most freely of the conduct of their general. This is the account we find in history of the virtue of a heathen; a virtue that puts to confusion the unchristian sensibility which makes us turn away from truth, when unpleasant and painful to our feelings. You will possibly reply that this object was the gratification of self-love, for he knew the high opinion that was entertained of his wisdom. In truth, the historian remarks, that on these occasions he enjoyed the consciousness of his reputation, as from every mouth he heard nothing but eulogiums; eulogiums to which he listened with the greater delight, because they were spontaneous. It might be so; but at any rate, it is certain, that had there been in his conduct any subject of reprehension, by the plan he adopted he put himself in the way to be informed of it; and in this respect, although a pagan, he is an admirable model for us.

I have further said, and it is a *second* argument in proof of what I have advanced, that as the truth which reproves, is the most essential to self knowledge, it is also the most efficacious in reforming our characters. Other truths instruct, affect, and convince, but they do not change us: this truth, without instruction, without conviction, without argument, or rather by the strongest argument, by the most powerful conviction, and by the most concise and the plainest instruction, is able to convert us. It obliges us to become acquainted with our own hearts, and produces self-annihilation by the exercise of repentance. These things it affects, as it were, by a natural consequence, and these things constitute the perfection of man. For the good opinion we had formed of ourselves, dissipated our minds, and carried us away with vanity and thoughtlessness: that afflictive truth, on the contrary, which appears in the form of reprehension, calls us to reflection, forces us to enter into an examination of our characters, from which we can scarcely divert our attention; and as, in this examination, we find nothing in our hearts that is not imperfect and humiliating, we can no longer regard ourselves with complacency, nor remain, if I may so speak, lost in self-admiration; we therefore make an effort to rise above ourselves; which effort is the genuine effect of repentance, and the certain consequence of being in any measure faithful to the grace of God. A striking

truth, seasonably uttered, will suffice to root from our hearts a vicious habit, or an evil passion. Whole years of reflection had left us unimproved; all other means had been feeble and useless; but this reproof, prudently administered, is the salutary draught which effects our cure: at first, it disquiets, it agonizes our minds; but grace and reason are at length triumphant over feeling, and this truth, though bitter, being directed by a wise and temperate spirit, becomes influential, and its very bitterness is the cause of our restoration. By refusing to hear painful truths, or to hear them unless concealed, disguised, and weakened; by requiring to have them softened and divested of all their poignancy to render them supportable, we renounce moral excellence, and resemble sick men who should condemn themselves to an incurable state, by vitiating the only remedy for their disease. Is it possible for a christian safely to encourage such a disposition? Let us reason as much as we will on the nature of our duties; but never shall we correct the vices and errors which afford us pleasure, except by listening to those truths which give us pain.

I mentioned, as the *third* reason for our seeking humiliating truth, the care with which it is generally concealed from us. It is of the highest importance to find a man enlightened, firm, and sincerely affectionate, who is willing to impart that

truth: such a friend was regarded by Solomon an inestimable treasure; such a friend, being rare in the extreme. You are aware, christians, that it is the maxim, or to speak more properly, the error of men of the world, to refrain from speaking unpleasant truths; that is to say, to conceal them from the persons to whom the knowledge of them would be useful; for they have ever been too much disposed to reveal them to those who were uninterested, and who ought to remain ignorant of them. They say all that is requisite, but it is said to any one, except the person to whom it would be beneficial: it is uttered from imprudence, from malice, from revenge where it ought to be concealed, instead of being made known where justice and conscience require: and at the very time they are violating charity and duty, by circulating a disagreeable truth, they conceal that truth, from motives of false charity, from him whom it personally concerns; and who alone could receive advantage from it. This is particularly evident with respect to the great, the rich and the powerful, whose misfortune it is, amongst many other disadvantages, inseparable from their condition, that truth is scarcely ever revealed to them; and who, without judging rashly, may with propriety regard all who approach them as seducers, interested in their deception, and disposed to represent every thing according to the specious appearance it derives from their own passions and wishes;

as persons, who, on many occasions, (such is the wickedness of the age!) would be extremely sorry to find the masters they serve, more enlightened than themselves, lest their characters should become more perfect than their own. Hence it arises, that those who are placed in the higher ranks of life, are generally the least conversant with truth.

For this reason, the Almighty so expressly commanded his prophets to reprehend vice with holy freedom. To Isaiah, he says; *cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet.* Instead of laying before the people truths that are curious, speculative, or soothing, place before their eyes such as will humble them; make them acquainted with their iniquities, and reprove their crimes; *shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins.* And lest, my brethren, you should reply that this injunction was intended only for a man who instructed the common people, I would remind you that the Lord also commanded Jeremiah to speak boldly in his name. *For, behold, I have made thee this day a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and brazen walls.* For what purpose was the prophet made an iron pillar, and brazen walls? Attend to the following part of the verse: *against the kings of Judah, against the princes thereof, against the priests thereof.* It was that he might oppose the great men, the nobles,

the princes, those who were placed in the highest stations, and whose office conferred the greatest authority. *Be not dismayed at their faces,* said the Almighty: let not their presence confound thee; let not respect for their persons shake thy firmness; flatter them not, nor evince in your conduct a servile deference; boldly proclaim the truth they ought to hear; be the apostle, and if needful, the martyr of that truth: for this purpose I have raised thee up, and poured my spirit upon thee: if thou, then, who art my messenger, refrain from uttering the truth, who will dare to make it known?

St. Paul exhorted his disciple Timothy to reprove, rebuke and exhort, rather than to console; and to do it without fear, although he might offend and be considered importunate: *preach the word, be instant in season, out of season.* He adds: *for the time will come, when they will not endure sound doctrine;* that is, doctrine which censures and condemns vice. May we not say that time is now arrived? If so, it is evident that the preachers of the gospel are more than ever under a strict and unavoidable necessity of proclaiming the truth, since from them alone can truth expect a steady and constant testimony. I am aware that it is their duty to be discreet, but God grant that their excessive prudence may not be the cause of your destruction. I am aware that their zeal ought to be according to knowledge; yet Heaven grant their

zeal may not be so enervated by knowledge as to render them, with respect to you, what St. Paul feared to become to those he taught—*as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.*

What must we do to avoid this evil? Ah! christians, the answer would be a most useful admonition, if we listened to it for the direction of our conduct. Our ardent love of truth, must be proportioned to the disgust with which it is regarded by self-love; we must respect those whom God employs to reveal the truth, and consider their manifestation of it an inestimable service, even when they speak unseasonably and in a repulsive manner; adopting the words of Solomon; *faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.*

As nothing can be more difficult than the communication of unpleasant truths, (this is my *fourth* and last consideration;) we should regard it as a duty to remove the difficulty from those, who are to undertake the friendly office. In what way, my brethren? By anticipating them; by giving them a favourable and encouraging reception; by proving, not by words only, but by suitable actions, that we respect their opinion, and listen to them with docility, and even with joy, being persuaded that they evince their zeal in the most unequivocal manner; dreading, at the same time, lest the slight-

est degree of irritability on our part, should put a stop to their endeavours, and lest we should blunt the edge of their zeal, by requiring too much care and delicacy in their reproofs.

For, I repeat, christians, and daily experience verifies the assertion, that if there be an occasion which demands a pure, disinterested, and generous zeal, it is when a secret malady is made known to him who considers himself in perfect health; in other words, when an unpleasant truth is uttered to him who believes himself irreprehensible. Is it needful to acquaint a man with the improprieties that are observed in his household, a woman with the reports that are circulated to her disadvantage, or a person of elevated rank, with the scandal his faults occasion? every one is desirous to excuse himself; each finds some plea for refu sing the commission, and the hazard attendant on it; so that scarcely in a family,—a family! did I say?—scarcely in a whole town, can a man be found who, disregarding every consideration but that of duty, will venture to pronounce the truth. Hence, arises the indispensable obligation which devolves on us, from our duty to God, still more than to the world, to be easy of access, gentle, and lowly of heart, when we receive advice or reprehension; since it is one of the most important precepts in the law of God, to overcome every thing which could prove an obstacle to our amendment;

and being required to answer for our ignorance, as for a criminal defect, we ought to honour the truth that afflicts our self-love, in proportion to the difficulty which others feel in making it known. Thus acted that unfortunate king of Babylon, of whom we read in scripture, when Daniel, with the boldness of a prophet, revealed to him three tremendous truths; the first, that he had been weighed by the Almighty, and found wanting; the second, that his kingdom was about to be divided between the Medes and Persians; and the third, that on the approaching night he should die. Every one around trembled at the temerity of this address, believing the destruction of Daniel inevitable, and not doubting that Belshazzar would sacrifice him to the first impulse of his wrath: but that prince, who possessed an elevated mind, and who in the most afflicting vicissitude, had preserved the moderation of his temper, was actuated by a very different principle. He embraced Daniel, and loaded him with benefits. *Then commanded Belshazzar, and they clothed Daniel with scarlet, and put a chain of gold about his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom.* Why did he thus reward the prophet? Because he considered that a man who had the courage respectfully to utter afflicting truths to a monarch, and who for the performance of this heroic duty, neglected his own interest, deserved every mark of distinction, and

could not be too highly exalted. Belshazzar honoured Daniel, because he was resolved at the expence of his own feelings, and in the extremity of his misfortune, to honour truth.

Alas! christians, what treatment does truth receive from us? Suffer me to make a comparison between that infidel king and ourselves; to compare our conduct with his example. Far from esteeming unpleasing truth, we hate and avoid it. This was the crime which a good man of old lamented, and of which he earnestly enquired the cause, in these affecting words addressed to the Almighty. Ah! Lord, why is that truth of which thou art the author an object of hatred to men? and how is the Saviour who came to announce that truth in thy name, become their enemy, since it is natural for man to aspire after a life of felicity, which consists in the heartfelt joy arising from the knowledge of truth? Then, answering his own enquiry, he adds; my God, I comprehend the mystery. Men, prejudiced by their passions, acknowledge as truth that only which they love, and which gives them pleasure; or rather, they create an imaginary truth out of that which gives them pleasure, and exclude from it all that is painful. They love the truth which is gratifying to their feelings, and detest that which is severe and humiliating.

This is a brief, yet striking description of the present age; for we also, my brethren, avoid the truth that reveals our true character; we even consider it a persecution; and when it sometimes appears before us notwithstanding our reluctance to behold it, we are troubled and enraged; we are offended with the persons who place it before our eyes, as if they were doing us an injury; and these occasions give rise to anger and resentment, to disgust and hatred, to misunderstandings and disunion. How many attachments have been broken off; how much intercourse has been destroyed; how many wars have been declared, in consequence of a truth being freely spoken! and it is still more astonishing that we often hate truth for the very cause which ought to endear it, I mean, from the certainty that it is truth. If that with which we are reproached were less true, it would not displease us so highly. Our vexation arises from its being more certain than we wish; from its being so true that we cannot disavow it.

Recollect, my dear hearers, this vice is not confined to the great, with whom the utterance of an unpleasing truth is, on many occasions, a signal for the destruction of him who pronounces it; for, not to mention more tragical events, how many faithful servants have incurred the displeasure of their rulers, and the ruin of their fortunes by a zealous attachment to truth? But this is likewise

the vice of persons in a lower rank, who are sometimes the most obstinate and intractable with regard to their faults. This is not only the vice of men of the world, but of men who appear uncommonly spiritual and devout; for such we behold, replete with sentiments of the most elevated piety, aspiring after nothing but God and his glory, strict in their conduct, and severe in their maxims, yet amidst all this, incapable of receiving admonition: they are officiously inclined to speak truth to others, but susceptible, even to irratibility, when it is spoken to themselves. They appear elevated like mountains; but when touched they are mountains of fire: and this leads me to doubt whether the apparent holiness of such christians is not an illusion; for real wisdom and real virtue consist in a desire of knowing our imperfections; according to the words of David, *my sin is ever before me.* Even in the preaching of the gospel(would it be credible if it were not proved by our own feelings.)in which we believe that God is speaking to us, we can scarcely endure the truth. Not that we are averse from preachers who proclaim truth, and even the most rigid truths of morality; nor are we backward in condemning them if from timidity they neglect their duty: but we love those only who preach general truths, and omit the truths which apply to our own characters; for as soon as their preaching affects our-

selves, and we perceive its tendency, the leaven of anger and bitterness begins to ferment in our hearts. Let them expatiate as much as they think proper on the defects of others; we listen to them joyfully, and never speak of them but with commendation: yet if their remarks extend to ourselves, our affections are at once alienated; from that time we cease to feel the esteem which rendered their instructions beneficial to us; from that time we begin to criticise and censure; an incorrect expression which may escape them is the subject of our ridicule and contempt; we even proceed so far as to conceive a hatred to their persons on account of the truth they lay before us; like that unhappy king of Israel who hated the prophet of the true God, and expressed his anger by saying, *did I not tell thee that he would prophesy no good concerning me, but evil.* What madness! could he expect any thing but truth from a prophet; or could he suppose that the prediction was less true because it displeased him?

Yet we may continually observe such folly as this; for were I here to proclaim the truth with all the freedom my ministry would authorise, and, considering every state and condition of men, to enter into certain details on which I might justly reproach them, I should excite indignation in the greater number of those I am addressing. The

truths I should express might be general, and spoken with all possible caution, notwithstanding which, if they were truths that forced hypocrisy to blush, and by anticipating the judgment of God, discovered in every one a cause of shame and confusion, they would draw upon me almost universal displeasure.

To justify this improper conduct, we profess to appeal to the word of God; we assert that it is not the province of a minister to particularise all the vices; not observing that we thus censure Jesus Christ himself, since no one ever pourtrayed vice so strongly as the Son of God, and the whole gospel is but, if I may so speak, a continued reprehension of the morals of his age, or rather of every age. The preacher, we say, ought not to enter into such minute details; but did we say this when he preached only those truths that applied to others, without reproving ourselves? Did we then feel so much anxiety lest ministers should violate discretion? No; we have felt it in consequence of the share we have in their admonitions, which proves that it is not a virtuous sentiment, but a secret dislike of truth. I attempt not to justify those who, by their injudicious and unchristian manners, insult and outrage, rather than instruct and persuade; yet I must condemn the fastidious feelings of those christians who can-

not endure to hear a preacher enter into particulars, and respresent the corruption of their hearts.

What will be the consequence of this voluntary ignorance? Truth, as a just punishment from God, will shew them the misery of their state, without revealing to them its own nature. Let us preserve ourselves, my brethren, from such awful blindness; let us open our eyes to the truth. I have already pointed out the necessity of loving that truth which reproves: let us in the second place consider the propriety of listening with caution and fear to the truth which flatters.

PART. II.

II. Were our minds as enlightened, and our hearts as firm and upright as perfect virtue requires them to be, we should not be reduced to the unhappy necessity of dreading not only the errors which prevail, but even truth itself, when agreeable and commendatory. Our vanity renders such truth dangerous, and by a strange perversion, makes the good we possess an occasion of evil. It is in the power of God only, christians, to hear commendation, without injury or danger. It is one of the prerogatives attributed to him in scripture: *Praise waiteth for thee, O God!* The Almighty is ever proclaiming the praises of his own character; he is perpetually hearing the voice of his creatures, ex-

tol his greatness and his justice; declaring that he is wonderful in counsel; that he alone is worthy of unbounded love: he receives the expression of these truths, without detriment to his infinite holiness; for both holiness and truth, being properties of his essence, it is impossible that truth should ever debase his holiness. But with us it is otherwise. Having in ourselves no immutable excellence, and our most established virtues, as far as they partake of our imperfection, having a natural instability, which even grace is unable to correct, if we judge aright, we shall avoid flattering truth as the mariner shuns a rock. And for this caution there are two reasons: the first, that according to the common practice of the world, with which we are too well acquainted, and of which we have too frequent experience, the thing that flatters is usually that which deceives and seduces. No illusion is more disgraceful in the opinion of the world, or more injurious to our interest with God, than that which for the gratification of our own feelings, and from a principle of self-love, leads us to mistake falshood for truth.—The second is, that whatever is flattering, although it may not be false, can scarcely fail to corrupt: and it ought to be a cause of shame and self-condemnation, that we are rendering ourselves liable, at the judgment of God, to the reproach of having suffered even truth itself to occasion our ruin, whilst the depravity of others was produced by error. I shall endeavour

to shew you that these two reasons are equally conclusive and edifying.

1. Those words of the Almighty, uttered by the mouth of the prophet Isaiah, are addressed to us, as well as to the Israelites, who heard them pronounced:—*O my people ! they which lead thee cause thee to err.* They who bestow on your unbounded commendation, they who call you blessed,much more they who deny your imperfections, are deceivers who impose on your credulity. What are the generality of praises lavished by the world? You are aware that they are but pleasing falshoods, flattering exaggerations, extravagent testimonies of feigned esteem, sanctioned neither by the understanding nor the heart; specious and honourable words, but words without meaning; deceptions, in short, which men perpetually practise, and by which their vanity is cherished. Deceptions authorised by false civility,mean courtesy, or servile avarice. We are complimented with possessing the virtues which ought to adorn our characters, and from a pitiable weakness, we are easily induced to believe ourselves distinguished by those excellencies which adulation attributes to us. Our persons are described as endued with the greatest attractions, and we think the representation perfectly natural. We are praised in compliment and hyperbole, and we imagine the commendation is simple truth. Our very passions

and vices are extolled, and we immediately regard them as virtues. *They which lead thee cause thee to err.* Hence we frequently see a man, naturally modest, a man who would be humble if he were acquainted with himself, intoxicated with this adulation, congratulating himself on merit to which he is a stranger; thanking God for various favours he never received; priding himself on talents which he never possessed; rejoicing in success which no one will acknowledge; secretly felicitating himself whilst others speak of him openly with contempt. Such are the usual consequences of that culpable inclination which leads us to seek, and delight in flattering truth; for we may all apply to ourselves those words, *They which lead thee, cause thee to err;* although it has been justly remarked, that they are more peculiarly applicable to the great, the rich, and the powerful.

Consider, my brethren, the source of that superstition and idolatry, which so long prevailed in the world. It arose from the errors I am combating; from the facility and eagerness with which men listen to all that is advantageous to themselves, how incredible soever it may be. The voice of adulation elevated certain men to divine honours, and from hearing themselves perpetually styled gods, they learned to expect the adoration paid to divine beings. Those who first addressed them in this language well knew that it was false, yet flattery induced them to act as if their words

had been sincere. The princes and conquerors who were the objects of such distinction, were themselves convinced of its impropriety, but ambition and political interest led them first to permit, and afterwards to exact it. It was the most senseless error which induced the multitude to practise this servility, and the error gradually becoming a fixed opinion, and rising insensibly into a law of religion, profane and impious men became the divinities of the earth; temples were erected for their worship, and altars raised on which sacrifices were offered to them: thus the devil availed himself of the folly of some and the pride of others.

We dare not assert that christianity has entirely destroyed this error: we may still see traces of it; and nothing is more common than a species of idolatry the practice of which is established in the world. The great and affluent are no longer called gods, but they are told that they do not resemble their fellow-mortals; that they have not the weaknesses of humanity; that they possess qualities which raise them above mankind; and they are treated so differently from other men, that they at length forget their nature and require to be served like gods; not considering, that they who pay them this sort of adoration, are usually interested persons, disposed to gratify, or rather determined to misguide them: *they which lead thee cause thee to err.*

Let us not consider the conduct of the great and powerful alone, as justifying my assertion: the idolatry of which I am speaking is equally prevalent in private stations, and productive of nearly similar effects. Thus a woman of the world is the idol of sensual men, who crowd around her, and by impious flatteries, amounting to adoration, inspire her with a self-complacency, too frequently the cause of her ruin, since it prevents her from becoming acquainted with her own character, and correcting her innumerable faults; and leads her, though frivolous and full of imperfections, to believe herself endued with every excellence, because she perpetually hears that sentiment from persons who would seduce and corrupt her. In like manner a false or timid friend, by his anxiety to please, becomes an idolater of his friend; depriving him of the most useful knowledge, the knowledge of himself, and by every flattering discourse introducing new errors into his mind. *They which lead thee cause thee to err.* What are all those public speeches and eulogiums, in which, under the pretence of eloquence, adulation and falshood boldly triumph over truth? What are those dedications of literary works, in which, according to the author's fancy, the least distinguished, is compared to the most eminent merit; in which the least admirable, are represented as the most sublime and glorious virtues; in which no individual is mentioned who is not qualified to govern the

state; no ecclesiastic who is not worthy of the highest station in the church? What are they but mercenary, false, and extravagant praises, by which men are infatuated? We know that in these compositions we should in vain seek for truth; yet so powerful is the influence of self-love, that we easily persuade ourselves they have some appearance of reality, some foundation in truth, for, as it has been ingeniously remarked, truth is so dear to men, that they who are attached to every thing else, are still resolved to believe it is truth they love.

I farther observe, we carry this vice, this profanation even into things of the most holy nature. From the pulpit, in which gospel truth alone should be pronounced, we daily hear the most servile flatteries. Instead of those pious addresses formerly delivered at a funeral, for the edification of the living, the preacher now utters a panegyric on the dead; a panegyric in which the most cowardly are transformed into heroes, the most deficient in talents to the sublimest geniuses, and, to adduce an instance of greater iniquity, the wicked are transformed into saints. Are not these the sad effects of that passionate love of glory so natural to men of the world? Yet these men who are so vain, and fond of glory, are inconsistent enough to declare that above all things they dread to be deceived. They have, in fact, no wish to be deceived, but, at the same time, they wish for every

thing that leads to deception. They are unwilling to be deceived, yet they are willing to be commended, flattered, and admired: they hate deception, yet love applause by which it is produced. Hence we may conclude that men love deception itself, although they will not acknowledge it; for however difficult it may be to imagine, it is evident that men are highly pleased, and even grateful when deceived by others. What course ought we then to pursue? I have already given you directions, my brethren: we should fear even truth when it tends to the gratification of our vanity, because the truth which has that effect is the truth that most resembles error, that is most easily confounded with error, and consequently most exposed to all the dangers of error. I again ask, what can be more disgraceful in the opinion of man, or more injurious to our interest with God, than the deceit of which we are speaking? Let us, however, disregard the world; its judgment is of little importance. Although it should excite the world's contempt to be deceived by false commendation; although nothing should render us so ridiculous as credulity, and arrogance on account of fancied merit; had we only the censure of the world to apprehend, our pride, and even our vanity might possibly render us independent. But how shall we answer when the Almighty shall reproach us with having sought after flattery till we heard only falsehood; with having been perpetually led astray by

the voice of the charmer; with having renounced unsullied light for the smoke of that incense in which we delighted? (for the light on which our salvation depended was hidden from our eyes because we *loved darkness rather than light.)* What shall we alledge in our justification? Shall we plead, like Adam, that we were tempted by our companion? Shall we profess to believe that we were required to trust in men? Shall we produce their authority to excuse the false estimate we have formed of ourselves? and will not God, the severe, yet equitable judge, more justly impute it to our vanity?

But I will imagine, christians, that you are never deceived by the persons to whose commendation you listen; that their desire of pleasing never leads them to violate truth:—attend to this idea, with which I shall conclude my discourse. I will imagine that the truth which affords us so much pleasure is, as we believe, unmixed with error; yet I maintain that as soon as we are flattered by it, it becomes the cause of our degeneracy, by inspiring us with a secret pride, which destroys its virtue, and by abating the ardent desire of perfection, which would have been more beneficial than all the gratification we have received. This truth, I acknowledge, is advantageous to your reputation, but if you love to hear it repeated, it will swell you with pride; it will raise you above

your station; it will render you haughty to your fellow creatures, and forgetful of God. Is it not then more desirable, that you should remain ignorant of such truth? How many minds have been poisoned, if I may so express myself, by a knowledge of their own excellencies! How many stars eclipsed by too powerful a reflection of their own brightness; that is to say, how many pious and enlightened minds have been corrupted, by the reflections they have been led to indulge on those gifts and graces, with which the Almighty had endued them. We see men who would have made great attainments, had they not been elated by the knowledge of their virtues. Others who would have become patterns of holiness, had not their piety been the subject of admiration; but, dazzled by the elevation on which they were placed, they have fallen from the summit into a fearful abyss. All the commendation they received was restrained within the limits of truth; the sincere expression of just regard; yet it was productive of the most injurious effects; it destroyed the foundation of grace, which is humility. Jesus Christ himself, who according to the scriptures, was the *chief corner stone;* Jesus Christ, whose sovereign greatness and adorable perfections claimed the tribute of fervent admiration, when on earth refused to hear that truth which contributed to his glory. He performed the greatest miracles, giving sight to those who were born blind, and raising the dead; but

when the people extolled his actions, and exclaimed that he was a prophet sent from God, he forbad them to speak, testifying the utmost uneasiness at their gratitude, or rather at the outward marks of their gratitude, because they obliged him to hear his own praises. Instead of receiving the homage rendered to his power, he exerted that power in rejecting commendation. Would it have endangered his virtue to have listened to commendation? No, christians, but it would have endangered ours. He forbad the utterance of those truths in which he might justly have gloried, that we might be led to fear the praises which by flattering our vanity would weaken the influence of grace in our minds; for he came to remedy our defects by the holiness of his example. If our Saviour thus acted for our instruction, ought not our conduct to resemble his, when such conduct is advantageous, or rather essential, to our own virtue.

Further: I have said, and the fact is self-evident, that flattering truth abates our ardent desire of perfection. The practice of holiness being difficult, and consisting in steady progress, resolute exertion, and self-government, however desirous we may be to obtain it, our efforts will ever be laborious, and if it were possible at the same time to avoid dishonor, we should gladly remit them. The commendation of men, even when just and sincere, produces this supine temper; for when

that commendation is often repeated, we imagine ourselves far advanced in moral excellence, and consequently grow remiss. Saint Paul, strong as he was in the grace of God, thus writes to the Philippians:—*Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.* How different is our conduct from that of the apostle! We regard with complacency the little we have performed, forgetting all that remains to be done. Hence even philosophy and human reason, are sufficient to shew us that a flatterer is more dangerous than an adversary.

Let us then, my brethren, impress on our minds these two important maxims. Let us love that truth which reproves, and fear that which commends. Let us forget our virtues, and constantly keep our faults in view. We are sanctified by the practice of goodness, and debased by the practice of wickedness; but, on the contrary, we are corrupted by the remembrance of our good works, whilst nothing tends so much to our sanctification, as the recollection of our sins. Thus the Almigh-

ty, by a peculiar effect of his providence, has afforded consolation to the sinner; subduing his iniquity, by the remembrance of past offences: at the same time he has given the christian cause of apprehension, by suffering his good works to present the most dangerous temptations. Let us ever mistrust the men who are lavish in our praise; and may each of us receive from others this glorious testimony; "I reverence that man who, superior to the rest of men, has preferred reprehension to applause." The flattering commendations of those who applaud, may prove deadly poison to our souls; but the wise and charitable reprehensions of a censor, a preacher, or a friend, may bring back our wandering feet to the way of life, and at length conduct us to eternal felicity.

SERMON III.

ON THE AFFLICTIONS OF THE RIGHTEOUS, AND THE PROSPERITY OF THE WICKED.

MATTHEW, VIII. 23, 24, 25, 26.

And when he was entered into a ship, his disciples followed him. And behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves: but he was asleep. And his disciples came to him and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish. And he said unto them, why are ye fearful, O! ye of little faith?

BEHOLD christians, a natural image of what is daily passing in the world. It appears, as if the holy Spirit, by thus presenting it to us, had designed to exhibit one of the greatest mysteries of Providence, with respect to man, and to make it the subject of our instruction. The disciples of Jesus Christ, the righteous, the elect of God, are placed in the world, which we may consider a tempestuous sea; a sea on which they are called to embark, by the command of divine providence: God is with them, and with them always: he accom-

panies them in all their ways, enlightening and sustaining them: but to judge only from appearances, we should conclude that, on numberless occasions, he had withdrawn his protection; that he had abandoned and forgotten them; that, with regard to them, he was as it were, *asleep*. He suffers them to be tost and tempest beaten, to be exposed to the hardest temptations, to be afflicted, and almost overwhelmed with the troubles of this life. Viewing them in such circumstances, who would believe that there existed a Providence, whose office it was to guard them; or, who would not at least suppose, that their protector was buried in a deep *sleep*, and ignorant of their distress, especially when the wicked are seen to prosper, to live in tranquility, occupy the highest stations, rejoice in the abundance of their riches, and possess all that we denominate human happiness? It was from the consideration of this state of things, so inconsistent with our ideas, that David exclaimed, *awake, why sleepest thou, Oh Lord?* and, in like manner, we, often say with the disciples, *Lord, save us; we perish!* Where art thou, Lord? We are perishing and thou hast forsaken us: we are encompassed with evils, and thou appearest insensible to our misery: but to these complaints, christians, we receive no other answer from God, than that which Jesus Christ made to his terrified disciples, *why are ye fearful, O! ye of little faith?* Where

is the confidencc you ought to repose in your God? Of what are ye afraid when I am with you?

On this mystery of divine providence, I mean my dear hearers, now to address you;—a subject of which it is of the highest importance for you to be well informed. It is not the wicked I am now called to address; it is the faithful, the elect, those whose first object is to serve the Lord, and who, notwithstanding their piety, often feel the afflicting hand of God, whilst sinners are passing their days in pleasure. To such characters I shall offer some considerations to console, and to strengthen them.

In every period, the faith of christians has been disturbed, and their confidence in God shaken, by seeing the wicked live in prosperity and peace, whilst the righteous are in adversity and trouble. This dispensation, apparently so unjust, has always been the cause of scandal and offence; for sinners have from thence taken occasion insolently to triumph, and even the greatest saints have been led to entertain doubts prejudicial to their faith. Listen to the words of David. *But as for me, my feet were almost gone: my steps had well nigh slipped.* As if he had said, I confess I have felt my faith shaken, and however solid the foundation of my hope, it was ready to give way: my heart swelled with zeal and indignation, when I saw the

wicked enjoying tranquility, and universal success. *For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.* How is it possible, he seems to say, that God should know and attend to what is passing here below, whilst the licentious and ungodly are the most happy, the most honoured, the most affluent? *How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most high? Behold these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world, they increase in riches. Verily,* he adds, *I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency.* Thus spake the Psalmist; and on the same ground were the faithful reproached by the heathens. Who is the God you serve? asked those idolators: where is his justice, where his kindness? He beholds you indigent and depressed, without affording you relief: is his power limited, or is he unwilling to help you? if he be either impotent or cruel, he is not God. You promise yourselves immortality in another world; but is it probable that a God whose power and goodness were sufficient to raise you from the dead, would not succour you in the present life? Yet you renounce our pleasures, you abstain from our entertainments, you suffer hunger and thirst, you undergo the greatest torments, and thus lose the enjoyment of the present life, without attaining that future and imaginary one which you expect. To this the fathers replied in various ways: they urged that the righteous are never miserable, and that the ungodly

never enjoy true happiness. *Let us well consider* said St. Augustine, *that God never permits the wicked to be happy. Nevertheless, they are thought to be so, but it is only by those who are ignorant in what true felicity consists.* We must not determine by the exterior. *A man,* says St. Ambrose, *may appear to me joyful, whose heart is agonised with a variety of griefs; in my eyes he is happy, but in his own opinion, and in reality, he is wretched.* But, christians, to take a different view of the subject, let us not deny that sinners have earthly joys; let us allow that the righteous are, in this world, as unhappy as the sensualist believes them. I still affirm that we are highly culpable if we mistrust divine Providence. To convince you of this I advance two propositions. In the first place, I observe, that in this part of the divine conduct, there is nothing which can justly cause our faith to waver. I go farther, and even assert that this part of the divine conduct is calculated to establish and confirm our faith.

PART I.

I. St. Augustine has a fine expression to indicate that the secrets of Providence should inspire us with respect, obtain our attentive consideration, and excite our inquiry as far as the humility of faith will permit; but that we should, on no occasion, suffer our minds to rise in opposition to them, nor

nor consider ourselves authorised to form a judgment of, or to contradict them: *Secretum Dei intentos nos habere debet, non adversos.* This my dear hearers, is an evangelical, and an important maxim; for one of our great defects is a proneness to be disgusted with whatever appears contrary to our understanding and opinions; and from this principle arise all our errors with respect to the divine proceedings. Attend therefore, whilst I apply the maxims I have repeated, to establish my first proposition, relating to the unequal division of the blessings and afflictions of this life, by which the pious are appointed to suffer, whilst the wicked remain in prosperity. I affirm, that there is nothing in this distribution to disturb our faith; for, although I should be unable to discover any reason for such conduct in the Almighty; although it were an abyss in which nothing was discernible, and in which my mind was entirely lost, my faith ought still to remain unshaken: I ought to exclaim with St. Paul, *O! the depth!* and acknowledge that it was one of the hidden things of divine wisdom, which I ought to reverence rather than scrutinize.

Have I not a thousand convincing proofs that there is a Providence in the universe, and that whatever takes place on the earth is by the appointment of God? I need only raise my eyes to contemplate the heavens; I need only consider all the

race of creatures; there is not one of them which does not clearly demonstrate this truth. The pagans and barbarians acknowledged it, and I should be more unbelieving than even professed infidels, were I to refuse my assent. Yet notwithstanding all this evidence, a difficulty arises in my mind. If there be a Providence, why does it suffer the just to be oppressed and the ungodly exalted? The inquiry may distress me; but I would ask you, christians, is it reasonable on account of this one difficulty to relinquish an article of faith, so firmly established as that of divine Providence; and because there may be a certain instance in which the conduct of that Providence, appears to me obscure, to consider it doubtful or rashly to reject it? Is it not more just to oppose all the principles of my faith, and all the illumination of my understanding, to the difficulty which perplexes me; and, being unable to search far enough into the mystery of this Providence, apparently so rigorous to the virtuous, and so liberal to the wicked, to reserve my examination for that period when I shall view it in its source, that is to say, in God himself?

And this was the determination of the royal prophet. After he had confessed to his God, that his comprehension was inadequate to the subject, and that a treatment so inconsistent with the worth of the righteous and the iniquity of the unrighteous, surpassed and overwhelmed his understanding, he

expresses his hope, that the Lord would reveal to him the order of his judgments, and clearly display the secret reasons which had caused such an arrangement of events: that he might know why the upright man was vexed and persecuted, and the power of the wicked prevailed against innocence and virtue: why the virtuous had failed in all his undertakings, and the faithless, unprincipled worldling had been successful in every enterprise: why, the pious and honourable female, passed her days in sorrow and wretchedness, whilst the woman who idolized the world, and gave herself up to the guidance of passion, enjoyed a life of ease and pleasure. The Psalmist trusts that God would make plain these mysteries; would, by infusing into our minds a ray of divine light, dissipate every cloud, and annihilate those doubts of his adorable Providence, which now force themselves on our understandings. He had imagined that by earnest investigation he could, in the present state, overcome the difficulties, and fathom the impenetrable counsels of divine wisdom. *I thought to know this:* but his opinion was ill-founded, and he discovered the vanity of his research: *it was too painful for me.* Thence he determined to wait till he had entered the sanctuary, and saw what was the end of the wicked: *until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end.* Thus reasoned that holy monarch, and the spirit of God directed his mind.

But after all, we are not, my dear hearers, on this subject, reduced merely to the exercise of submissive faith; we can discover as much, and perhaps more, to satisfy the inquiring mind, in this than in any other mystery of Providence; for which reason we are utterly inexcusable, if when we see the righteous in affliction, and sinners enjoying all the delights of this life, we distress ovrselves, and yield to distrust: for there are reasons which perfectly justify the conduct of the Almighty, and which may convince us that he has acted wisely. If I, therefore, with a mind, so subject to darkness and error, can discern reasons for such a dispensation, ought I not to conclude, that God is actuated by others still more solid and elevated, which surpass my powers of investigation; and ought not these hidden motives, the existence of which I believe, from tracing those that are evident, to tranquillize and console me? All, then, that remains for me is to endeavour, although I cannot fully understand, to gain some insight into the dea lings of Providence, that by what is discernible I may learn to judge of what escapes my view, and that both may serve to strengthen my faith.

. . . . . .

But you may inquire, christians, what are the reasons I have discovered for a distribution which so bewilders our understandings.—The following present themselves to my mind. The Almighty intends to try his chosen people, and to give them

occasions of proving their constancy and fidelity. To use the comparison of the royal prophet, he would *purify them in the fire of tribulation, as gold is refined in the furnace*; that he means to insure their salvation by sheltering them from the inevitable dangers which attend worldly prosperity; that, he kindly compels them to remain in union with him, by imbittering every thing in this world, and filling it with objects from which they must turn with dissatisfaction and disgust; that he furnishes them with continual occasions for combat, that they may at the same time have continual occasions for triumph; that, holy as they are, they cannot fail of being guilty in various instances, since the most righteous, as Solomon observes, *fall seven times a day;* but that the Almighty correcting them as a father, and not as a judge, inflicts chastisement in this world according to his mercy, that he may not punish them in the next according to his justice. If we stop here, my dear brethren, without searching farther into the designs of Providence, is not what we have already advanced sufficient to support the faith of the righteous? And is not any one of these reasons sufficiently powerful to defend and strengthen it against the most violent attacks? Let the Omnipotent, then, ordain according to his will; let him destroy and overthrow, let him abase and humble, and smite when he sees fit, yet the good man will never cease to bless his name; or, should he feel a dis-

position to murmur, God might well address to him our Saviour's reproof of St Peter:—*O thou of of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?* Short sighted mortal! leave your creator to act as he thinks proper; he loves you, he knows what is fit for you; his conduct towards you may appear rigorous, but however severe the strokes he inflicts it is love that guides his arm,

Affecting considerations! powerful motives for christain consolation! In this numerous auditory there are surely many souls precious in the sight of God, whom he nevertheless abandons to the humiliations and crosses of this life. It is my duty to impress on your minds these truths; and by their influence, to raise you from the dejection into which you are, perhaps, thrown by a state of poverty, of humiliation, of sorrow, which overwhelms you, and renders life toilsome and grievous: it is my duty, as a preacher of the gospel, to furnish you with all the support that is needful for your faith; to console you under affliction; and as Jesus Christ speaks to you by me, I this day repeat to you the words of that divine Saviour: *Come uto me, all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.* Come, sorrowing and afflicted souls, come to me, ye who groan beneath the weight of grief and pain. The world will treat you only with contumely and requlse; every day you feel its injustice: the votaries of

licentiousness and vice, tyrannize over the most virtuous: these considerations desolate your hearts, and overwhelm you with grief: but again I say, come; and without removing you from your present condition, I will alleviate its miseries: *come unto me and I will give you rest.*

I am but a man, feeble as yourselves, and even more feeble than yourselves; but by the grace of my God, with the power of his word, and the maxims of his gospel, I have wherewith to render you immoveable amid the roughest storms; to revive your faith, to reanimate your hope, to teach you that the most alluring objects in this world are not to be desired, and to make you acquainted with the great advantage of a state, in which the watchful care and love of God are proportioned to his apparent neglect of your interest, and indifference towards you.

To repeat then, and more fully to develope what I have briefly suggested, and what requires your most serious attention, since it should be to you an inestimable treasure, an inexhaustible source of patience, I assert, that if God treats the righteous man with apparent severity, if he cause him to suffer affliction, it is intended to try him. So it is expressed in various parts of the scripture, where the Almighty declares that such is the office of his Providence, and that for this purpose

he lays his afflicting hand on those who serve him, rather than on other men. Affliction, therefore, in the sacred writings, is frequently called *trial*, or *temptation;* and in like manner, what by the Holy Spirit is called *temptation*, means nothing more than *affliction*. It was an admirable reply which was made by one of the most zealous defenders of christianity, to those idolaters and infidels, who, from the extreme misery of the righteous, drew an argument against either the power or goodness of God. You are mistaken, said he; our God is deficient neither in mercy, nor in the means of relief; but it is his will to try every one of us; and how does he try us? By depriving us of the good things of this life, and keeping us in adversity. He examines and tries the heart of man by suffering and affliction. As if the Almighty were saying to the righteous:—declare yourselves, and shew what you are; your characters have not yet been fully exhibited, let your conduct manifest them: whilst you possessed earthly happiness, and lived in tranquillity, you professed, it is true, to be devoted to me; but your profession was not to be trusted: in that prosperous situation you were not sufficiently acquainted with yourselves, and could not assuredly determine whether you were devoted to yourselves or to me: but now that misfortune has imbittered your existence; now that you suffer from infirmity and want, and every evil is assailing you, it is in your power to

evince your faith, and your professions will be indisputable. If then, you persevere in serving me; if you cease not to repeat your protestations of inviolable attachment, I will listen to and believe you; for affection thus tried is no longer liable to suspicion.—Christians, what can we reply? If the sinner is exempt from these trials, with what feelings should we contemplate his pretended happiness? Should we arm it with envy, or rather should we not view it with a secret horror, since the Almighty spares him because he judges him unworthy of his care; he no longer exerts his power to form him for himself, but regards him as base metal which the workman neglects, whilst the gold is thrown into the furnace, and made to pass through the fire. This consideration led the Psalmist to frame that devout petition; *examine me, O Lord, and try me.* Ah! Lord, refuse me not the consolation, the inestimable privilege of shewing my heart to thee with all its feelings, and as nothing will call them into exercise like suffering, cause me, if needful, to pass through the hottest fire of affliction; I submit to thy will: *try my reins.*

We should consent to this trial, my brethren, the more readily, because another of God's designs in afflicting the righteous, is to purify them from all earthly affections. Were temporal prosperity the attendant on virtue, we should serve

God merely to obtain that prosperity, and consequently should not love him for his own sake. When you see the enemies of God, the slaves of passion, in a state of affluence, it gives you a painful feeling; you say within yourselves, so long a time have I served my God, obeyed his commandments, and fulfilled the duties religion enjoins; yet my lot is ever the same, my affairs are ever unsuccessful; as if the Supreme Being had resolved in every instance to oppose me. These men are living in vice, unfettered by the restrains of piety, and yet they enjoy vigorous health, they accumulate riches, they are honoured and distinguished! Are these then, christians, all the enjoyments you have sought? You wished to please God that you might obtain corporeal health, and worldly prosperity and honors! If so, you were justly deprived of them, that you might learn to love God, not for what he bestows on you, but for what he is in himself: for, recollect, if you are righteous, you are living under a covenant of grace, and as that grace is entirely gratuitous on the part of God, so should your love to him be of the same nature; you should love him without requiring other recompence than himself. Earthly blessings would render your affection mercenary, and if you murmur when the Almighty withholds, or takes them from you, it is evident that they are more dear to you than your God.

Worldly advantages are indeed so pernicious, that they have power to corrupt the most holy: frequently have they been the means of plunging them into a fearful abyss of depravation and guilt. Many and glaring have been such instances. How then does God in his merciful Providence usually guard his elect from such danger? By a poverty which is the best preservative against the contagion of riches; by an obscurity which is the most effectual defence against the influence of perishable honours; by a langour and weakness of body, which preserves from the infection of sensual pleasures, and the flattering illusions of the flesh. The righteous man, it is true, may not now be aware of the dangers to which he would have been exposed, had not his situation thus protected him; but what he sees not at present, he will see at the end of time, at the great day of discovery; for till that period, the Almighty waits to place before his eyes all the injustice to which he would have been led by a greedy and insatiable avarice; all the criminal projects and intrigues in which a boundless ambition would have engaged him; all the excesses, all the pernicious and infamous habits into which he would have fallen from the exercise of blind passion, and brutal licentiousness, had he not been restrained by the curb of affliction; had not the humiliations to which he was subjected, prevented the fire from kindling in his breast. At that day, his mind being enlightened

by celestial knowledge, he will penetrate the salutary and merciful secrets of eternal wisdom, which directed his affairs, and a thousand times bless the Almighty for what once seemed calculated to excite only discontent: he will regard as a mark of predestination, as one of the most inestimable blessings of his heavenly Father, that which the world considered a total abandonment, a species of reprobation.

Still farther to illustrate the mercy of Divine Providence, I add, that as it is not sufficient to be kept at a distance from the world, and from opportunities of sinning, if we are not thereby drawn closer to God, he afflicts his people that he may attract them towards himself, and lay them under the necessity of applying to him alone, and reposing all their confidence in him. Many appear to enter the kingdom of heaven, only because they are compelled: they are such as do not resolve to seek God, until they find that no other object can give them satisfaction. Had the world been to them what it is to the worldling; that is to say, had it flattered and idolized them, had it received them with complaisance and honourable distinction, ah! Lord, would they ever have thought of thee? Like that worldly-minded people thou preservedst with so much care, and feddest on the fat of the land, they would have forgotten their creator and

benefactor; they would not have remembered that thou wast their God; their incense would have arisen from other altars than thine: but by laying thy hand heavily upon them; by causing them to find on earth only briars and thorns, afflictions which distressed them, crosses which forced them to retreat from the world and remain in obscurity; by subjecting them, as it were to death, thou hast given them life; by apparently ruining, thou hast saved them: they have found thee their only resource, and therefore thou art become the object of their choice: they have fled to thine arms for shelter, and thou hast received them, and there thou preservest them in safety. *I cried unto God,* says the Psalmist, *with my voice, even unto God with my voice, and he gave ear unto me.*

The righteous have many conflicts to sustain; it is the will of God that they should have them: why? because these conflicts are the foundation of their excellence. Without combat no victory can be obtained, and without victory no crown can be hoped for. You are astonished, that God thus tries his most faithful servants, and on the contrary leaves the greatest sinners in profound peace: you inquire the reason of this difference; it is of necessity, and according to the nature of things: our God crowns none but the victorious, and it is his will that his elect should be crowned; therefore he must furnish them with occasions of

triumph: but the crown not being prepared for sinners, by an opposite conduct, he affords them no opportunity of conflict or victory. He acts like earthly princes, or rather, earthly princes imitate his conduct; and this does not excite our wonder; we do not suppose that they have abandoned those whom they appoint to certain honours when, in order to elevate them, they load them with cares, or expose them to numberless dangers; this is not esteemed by the world indifference or harshness, but kindness and favour.

Let us however acknowledge, that God really exercises severity towards the righteous; still, ought we not to consider it a paternal and merciful severity? There is no christian, however holy, who does not commit sin. The most innocent, the most righteous person in this life, is not one who has never sinned, and who never sins; (where could such an one be found?) but one who has committed, and who still commits the fewest sins; whose offences are venial; and who has quickly resumed his habits of virtue: but whatever his character may be, he is still liable to punishment: but when shall that punishment be inflicted? If after death, what judgment will be passed on him, what punishment must he undergo! It is therefore to his advantage, that suffering should be inflicted in this life; and such, in fact, is the time

which God has chosen; such are the means he employs for his correction. Saint Jerome writes thus to an illustrious female, to console her for the losses she had sustained, and which caused her the most pungent sorrow.—"Why, so many tears, why so much regret? Either from the testimony of your conscience, and without violating the sentiments of christian humility, you consider yourself righteous; then your consolation should be that God is perfecting your virtue by bringing it into exercise; or else the recollection of your falls, and the feeling of your weakness, lead you to regard yourself as criminal; in which case, to soften your affliction, and render it not only supportable but consolatory, you should reflect that God is correcting you; and how much less is your punishment than your iniquities deserve?" But why does he not correct that libertine? Ah! my dear hearers, be contented that God loves you, and do not oblige him to render you an account of the dreadful punishments he inflicts on others. I have frequently told you, and I cannot too often repeat, that the vengeance of God is severe in proportion to the time it has been delayed; and woe to the rich ones of the world, woe to the powerful, to the luxurious, to the proud, whom he feeds as victims for the day of his wrath!

Let us here pause, and reflect a moment at the conclusion of the first part of our discourse. By

the considerations to which I have been calling your attention, we have justified the ways of Providence, in the distribution of temporal prosperity and adversity to the righteous and the wicked: we have vindicated the divine proceedings by proving, that God in this life watches over his people; and that at the same time his justice is employed against the wicked. To try his people, to purify, to preserve them; to bind them to himself by a closer tie; to enable them to acquire greater degrees of virtue, that they may rise to higher degrees of glory, and by light afflictions to remove every obstacle to their future felicity; are not these the salutary cares of wisdom and benevolence? But on the contrary, to resign the wicked to themselves and the empire of their passions; to leave them in the fatal repose in which they quietly rest; to suffer the false pleasures which corrupt them to retain all their charms; to let them remain in a state of elevation which swells them with pride, in grandeur which dazzles, in affluence which enfeebles, in luxury which leads them into the wildest irregularities, in a forgetfulness of salvation and hardness of heart which preceed an impenitent death; are not these acts of justice the more tremendous as they are the less apparent? We are deceived, because we judge of things as they exist in the present transitory state, whilst God judges of them with reference to eternity. Now which of these rules is to be preferred? "I acknowledge," says a

well-known author, "according to the first, the sinner appears authorized to insult the good man, and to ask him, *where is your God?* But according to the other rule, which is undoubtedly the more just, and, in short, the only one by which we can determine, the righteous may reply to the insulting sinner;—neither my hour nor yours is yet come; let us wait till it arrives, and then I will ask you, where are the gods you worshipped, and in which you trusted? Where is that felicity that enchanted you, and became the object of your idolatry? Why do you not recall it, to banish the misery into which you are fallen?"

It is your part then, my dear hearers, to enter into the views of your God when he afflicts you, and to forward his designs by your patience. The greatest subject of your regret ought probably to be, that you have not, to the utmost, improved a talent which might have yielded a hundred fold, and that you have listened too much to the doubts which arose in your mind, and suffered them to prompt injurious murmurs against the providence of that God who loves you: that you have paid too much attention to the seducing conversation of the world, respecting your afflictions and the apparent wretchedness of your condition; that you have taken too much pains to excite the compassion of men, to obtain their vain consolations, whilst you should rather have considered your-

self an object worthy of envy, and have rested on your faith for support: that you have not sufficiently entered into the truth of those great maxims of the gospel:—*blessed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven; blessed are they that mourn, that suffer persecution on the earth, for they shall be comforted in heaven.*

Oh! God, my mind is now enlightened; I know enough to dispel all my doubts, to tranquillize all the anxieties of my heart. Out of so many reasons, one alone would suffice; and even without those reasons, ought I not to be satisfied with knowing that whatever happens to me, is the operation of thy will? Order all things, my God, as thou seest fit, and do unto me according to thy pleasure. Let the impious man tyrannize over the godly, and trample him beneath his feet, and let me be treated with the greatest ignominy, yet I will not exclaim like the dismayed apostles; *Lord, save us; we perish;* but, confiding in thine infinite wisdom and sovereign mercy, I will say, with one of the most faithful of thy prophets; *in thee, O Lord, have I put my trust; let me never be ashamed.* I am assured that all will be well with me whilst I put my confidence in thee, and that this dispensation of thy Providence which is so astonishing to men, so far from having a tendency to *shake* my faith, is calculated to *confirm* it.

PART II.

II. Yes, christians, if any thing can confirm my faith and strengthen my hope, it is to behold the ungodly rise and prosper in the world whilst the righteous are in humiliation and adversity. This proposition may at first seem paradoxical, but let us examine, and we shall find it an incontestible truth; we shall see that it is founded on the most soldid, and even the most evident principles of *natural reason*, of *experience*, and of *religion*. Consider this with attention; for I will venture to affirm, it is the essential point on which depends the whole of christian morality. In short, a sight of the calamities which befall the righteous, and of the prosperity of the wicked, although a seeming irregularity, is one of the strongest and most convincing proofs that there is another life after the present, and that our souls die not with our bodies; that we may hope for salvation, reward, and glory after death; that all our expectations are not confined to our present state, and that God reserves us for something better and more noble: this is the dictate of *reason*.

I add further;—this consideration proves to us that Jesus Christ, our master, in whom we trust, is faithful to his word, that his predictions are true, that he has not deceived us, and that we

may depend with safety on his promises, since their accomplishment is already taking place: this is the dictate of *experience.* In short, this dispensation vindicates itself, for nothing is more conformable to the order established by God in the predestination of men, than the sufferings of the righteous and the temporal advantages of the wicked: this is the dictate of *religion.* Are not these three very powerful considerations for the support of our faith? I know that there is a future life to which I am called, a life of happiness which is appointed me, and my *reason* makes it known; I know that whatever the Son of God has predicted will come to pass, whether it relates to the righteous or to sinners, therefore I can rely on all his promises; this is confirmed by my own *experience.* I know and see that all the regulations respecting the predestination of men, as the Almighty has well conceived it, are already beginning to take place. What *faith* is there, however feeble and wavering, that would not be fortified, awakened, and reanimated by these thoughts; which, I repeat, evidently arise from the state of suffering and affliction in which we behold the children of God, whilst the wicked are living in affluence and pleasure. Let us resume and illustrate these three particulars.

No licentious man, whether he be so in morals or in faith, would remain unchanged by a

conviction that there is a future life. The reason of his licentiouness is a disbelief, or an imperfect belief, of the truth and reality of all that he hears of that future existence to which we aspire, as the end of our career, and the object of our hope. Whatever he may think on the subject, (for it is not to him that I am now addressing myself, nor for his sake that I am speaking) I, who believe in God, the creator of the universe, in order to reassure my mind, and keep alive in my heart a vigorous faith and firm reliance, make this use of the strange diversity of conditions in which the virtuous and vicious are placed. Virtue, I argue, is generally oppressed in the world; vice is predominant and victorious; we see the righteous miserable and stripped of their all, the friends of God persecuted, the saints despised and deserted. What should I conclude from hence? That the good man has other blessings in store than these visible and perishable ones which are denied him, and that those blessings will be given him in a future life. This conclusion has ever been formed by the fathers of the church; it is the grand argument they have employed against those persons, who, though convinced of the existence of God, yet attempt to deny the immortality of the soul. William of Paris, after using several other arguments taken from the nature of man, returns to this as the most irresistibly convincing.—"You acknowledge

with me, the existence of a first cause; you believe in God; but, tell me, does this God love those who serve, and endeavour to please him? If he neither loves them nor interests himself in their welfare, where are his wisdom and goodness? If he loves them, in what does he evince his love? He does not shew it in this life, since he leaves them in adversity, nor in the other life, for you deny the existence of any other. Examine, have recourse to all the subtilties your minds can suggest; you can never obviate this difficulty but by confessing the immortality of the soul, and a future state after death, in which God will reward each one according to his works: for as the Supreme Being must be, as God, perfect in all his attributes, his justice must be perfect, and perfect justice must necessarily give rise to consummate judgment: that judgment is not carried into effect in the present world, for the ungodly are here sometimes the most happy; it must then be accomplished in the other world, and consequently there is a future existence to be expected. We might otherwise consider the righteous as fools and the wicked as sages, because the wicked would seek true and solid advantages in attaching themselves to the present life, and, on the contrary, the righteous would subject themselves to much labour and suffering in reaching after imaginary good." Thus, christians, this venerable writer found in the adversity of good men an

invincible reason for the belief of a state of eternal felicity!

Another of the fathers argues in a similar manner.—"Would you acquire the patience of the saints, consider the eternity of God; then the most grievous dispensations, far from dejecting you, will render your faith and hope still more constant. For when you distress yourself because virtue is treated injuriously, whilst vice is honoured, you reason on a false principle. You contemplate only the few days of which your life is composed, as if all the designs of God, were to be accomplished in those days: you would now see the righteous crowned and recompensed, and the impious struck by the vengeful hand of divine justice; your are unwilling that God should delay his judgments; you would have them all executed in the brief space of your existence: but this you ought not to require: God will accomplish his purposes, in his own time, though not in yours. The season of God is eternity; yours is this mortal life. If, therefore, you would strengthen your faith, and support your hope, you have only to remind yourself constantly of the eternity of God. From witnessing the apparent injustice with which he treats man on the earth, being so severe to his friends, and so forbearing to his enemies, you will draw the inference that he has prepared an eternity, in which he will bestow, on each class the recom-

pence which his justice awards, since in this life, their lot is so inconsistent with their characters."

This view of eternity has rendered the saints invulnerable to the strongest temptations. When did Job speak of a future and immortal state, with the most vigorous faith, yea with absolute certainty? It was when he had lost his riches, his possessions, his family; and destitute of all support, was reduced to sit among the ashes. *I know that my redeemer liveth:* he exclaims. I know that he liveth and that I shall live eternally with him. I have not merely an obscure revelation, but a certain evidence of this truth. *I know.* How did he acquire this knowledge? From the very calamities with which he was afflicted. When had David the clearest view of eternal felicity? When did he express himself as if the heavens had been open before his eyes, *I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living?* It was at the time of Saul's furious persecution. Ah! he exclaims, I already seem to behold the brightness of that glory, which God has destined for his elect. But how, divine prophet, did you discover this? You are encompassed with evils and afflictions, yet you profess, amidst them all, to behold the glory of the Almighty? Those evils which surrounded the Psalmist, were his certain pledges of another life, and the seal of the Almighty. The light of reason convinced him, that the persecutions

he underwent from Saul, being contrary to all justice, it was consistent with the providence of God, that there should be a future state, in which his innocence should be acknowledged, and his patience rewarded. This is what he meant to express when he said, *I had believed to see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.*

We have still clearer light, christians; we have the predictions of Jesus Christ, the accomplishment of which is proved by our own experience. Had the Son of God promised that those who followed him, and attached themselves to his service, should, in this world, be exempted from all affliction and disgrace, should abound with riches, revel in continual pleasures, and that all sorrow and vexation should fall to the lot of the ungodly; then, I acknowledge, our faith might with reason waver at the sight of a good man in poverty, humiliation and grief, whilst the libertine possessed affluence, authority and honour. I should then find it difficult to overcome the doubts that arose in my mind, because I should believe I had been deceived by Jesus Christ himself, since I experienced the very opposite of what he had promised. But when I consult the sacred oracles, and find them exactly fulfilled in the dispensations of Providence; when I hear my adorable Saviour clearly and unequivocally telling his disciples, *the world shall rejoice, but ye shall be in tribulation;* when I hear him

declare in the most express terms, that they should be exposed to persecutions; enumerate the crosses they would have to bear, the injurious treatment they would meet with, and conclude *by foretelling these things that they may not be surprised nor scandalized when they come to pass,* and that they may remember that he had predicted them; I say, when all these predictions occur to my mind, and I see these things every hour exemplified in my own experience, and in numberless instances claiming my attention, is it possible that my confidence should not be redoubled, and receive continual accessions of strength? If I beheld all the wicked in affliction, and all the righteous enjoying felicity, I should be perplexed, because the words of Jesus Christ would not be verified: but whilst the virtuous suffer and the ungodly have every worldly advantage, I shall have no reason for fear, but my confidence will remain unshaken. The Son of God who has said to the righteous, *ye shall be sorrowful,* has likewise said, *your sorrow shall be turned into joy.* He who has predicted their sorrow and adversity, has also engaged to receive them into his kingdom; a kingdom of celestial and perfect felicity. Our Saviour is not less infallible when he predicts the good than the ill, for his word is eternal truth. Hence I adopt the sentiment of the great Apostle, and say with him; I suffer, but I suffer without murmuring, without anxiety or distress, for I know in whom I have

trusted, and in whose word I confide. I know with certainty, not only that he is able, but that he is willing, and that he will accomplish whatever he has promised to me, and to all those who wait in silent resignation for that blessed day, when he will come to acknowledge his saints, and fulfil all their hopes, and expectations.

In concluding this discourse, I would address myself to the man whom, of all this assembly, the Omnisicent sees to be the most holy, and yet has endowed with the smallest portion of his temporal gifts. It is true, my dear brother, nor can I be ignorant, that your lot among men is grievous and melancholy; but this proves that you are, if I may so express myself, stamped with the seal of the elect, the seal of the only Son of God, the head and pattern of the elect. This important truth of the gospel has frequently been laid before you; that Jesus Christ being the pattern of the elect, they must, in order to partake of his glory, bear a resemblance to his holiness: for, according to the excellent and sublime theology of the Apostle of the gentiles, such is the indispensible condition on which God makes them partakers of his glory: *For whom he did foreknow, he did also predestinate to be conformed to the image of his son.* Now we know that Jesus Christ, when on earth, lived in the same state as that to which the Almighty suffers the righteous to be reduced; that he walked in the same path; that

he was subject to the same opposition, the same contumely, the same contradictions. Oh! the depth of the divine counsels and wisdom! Tiberius reigned as sovereign, and the Son of God was his subject. Pilate was invested with supreme authority, and the Son of God was summoned to appear before his tribunal. This was the way in which God, by Jesus Christ, wrought out the salvation of sinners; and this is the way, my dear hearer, in wnich he works by you, and consummates your salvation. He characterizes you by the features and image of his son: without this you would have every thing to fear; but with this distinguishing mark of the favour of God, what may you not hope? *Whom he did foreknow, he did also predestinate to be conformed to the image of his son.*

You may object, that we sometimes see virtuous men opulent, honoured, and distinguished in the world. This I acknowledge, but to that objection I have to reply:—Were there among the righteous none but the indigent and the afflicted; none but those who by the obscurity of their situation, or the distressed state of their affairs occupied the lowest ranks of society, the other classes would then be excluded from the kingdom of God; their situation alone would fix them in a state of reprobation, or they must inevitably renounce it: but it is the will

of Providence to establish and maintain different ranks in society. Whence it follows that it would not be consistent to affix to them inevitable perdition, but that examples of holiness, should be found in them, lest all who are thrown into those ranks, should yield to absolute despair. I add, that if the righteous have sometimes been found in a state of earthly prosperity, that state has made them tremble with apprehension, kept them in continual distrust of themselves, and humbled and confounded them before God. For what reason? Their fear that God had rejected them, and that they should never reign with Jesus Christ, in his triumphant glory, since they could not trace in their prosperity the image of his sufferings. Therefore to supply what was wanting in them, to acquire this needful conformity, what course did they pursue? They did not abdicate their station, for they believed themselves called to it by God; they were resolved to obey his will, and were careful to improve their talents; but under the specious exterior of an easy and prosperous condition, they practised all the self-denial of christianity. Without renouncing their condition, or an appearance corresponding to it, they were indifferent to its pleasuses; in the midst of affluence, they could descend to the inconveniences of poverty; surrounded with honours, they could practise the duties of humility; in the midst of their peculiar employments, they never forgot the duties of retirement:

all this they did to be numbered amongst them of whom the apostle said: *Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his son.*

Again: you may say that we have seen and still see wicked men equally afflicted with the righteous. This is acknowledged: but without examining all the reasons which prevent the Almighty from suffering vice to be invariably prosperous, I shall content myself with making this one observation. The vicissitudes and humiliations to which some sinners, as well as virtuous men, are subject, are the most valuable and convincing proofs that God has not entirely abandoned them; and that it would be an awful judgment on them if their feelings were spared, if they were flattered, if they were never thwarted in their vicious pursuits: that the last method which remains for God to employ to bring them into the way of salvation, to receive them in to the arms of his mercy, is to chastise them in the present state, and by chastising, to reform them, and re-produce in them by this reformation the image of his son which they had effaced: so that this brings us again to that expression of the Apostle; *Whom he did foreknow, he did also predestinate to be conformed to the image of his son.*

Heaven grant, my dear hearers, that you may have thoroughly understood this mystery of Providence which I have been endeavouring to explain; that in the afflictions with which God visits you, you may see the love that interests him in your behalf; that the hope of the righteous may be re-animated and his patience renewed; that the sinner who is dazzled by the false splendor that surrounds him, and inebriated by false happiness, may at length see the fallaciousness of his opinions, and henceforth withdraw his heart from worldly objects to fix it on solid happiness. And do thou, O my God! remain unchangeable in the dispensations of thy Providence: act according to thy wisdom and not according to our thoughts. Thy views are infinite, ours are limited; thy views are pure, ours are earthly; thine tend to our salvation, ours tend to our destruction. If nature revolt, if our senses rebel, O! grant not Lord, the demands of our stubborn will, or our blind and fleshly senses. Yeild not to our desires as thou formerly didst in thine anger to those of the jewish people; but ever follow thine own adorable designs, and whatever present suffering they may occasion us, execute them for thy glory and our eternal felicity!

SERMON IV.

ON PRAYER.

MATTHEW, XV, 22.

And behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a demon.

IF ever the efficacy of prayer was clearly and strikingly manifested, was it not, christians in this instance, recorded in our text, in which we behold the Son of God himself lost in wonder and admiration?—The son of God, who confounded the powers of hell, who wrought miracles, employed all his power in favour of a stranger who implored his assistance, and who, idolater as she was, has set us an example, and taught us how to pray. Jesus exclaims: *O woman, great is thy faith!* Does it not appear that this strength of faith, and this fervor of entreaty were extraordinary, and even surprising to the son of God?

What is the petition offered by this suppliant? That her daughter may be healed: and our Sa-

viour at once restores the daughter, and sanctifies the mother: *be it unto thee even as thou wilt.* It is evident, my dear hearers, that nothing is more efficacious than prayer. Whence, then, doth it arise that our supplications are frequently unacceptable to God; that we pray, and are not heard; that we ask and obtain not? This inquiry I shall pursue in the present discourse. The subject is of high importance, and claims peculiar attention; for what I have in view, christians, is your instruction in the noblest of exercises; the most effectual mean of salvation; that you may know the inestimable secret, the divine art of touching the heart of the Almighty, and of procuring the richest treasures of his grace.

The infallible efficacy of prayer is a truth firmly established by the christian religion. Such is the energy of prayer that it seems to render the word of man, powerful as the word of God: for as the creator made all things by a single word; *he commanded, and they were created;* so is the word of man all powerful in obtaining his desires; *ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.*

We every day, hear men complaining of the inutility of their prayers; of the little fruit they derive from them. This is not surprising; for in what sense is prayer infallibly efficacious? To

render our prayers thus efficacious, they must be holy, and offered up with the observance of all the conditions annexed to them by God, when he promises to grant all our requests: but our prayers are often defective, both in their subject, and in the manner in which they are presented. The Apostle James said to the christians in his time, and I repeat his words to you: *Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss.* We do not ask of God, that which he wills we should ask; a defect in the *matter* of our prayers. We do not ask of him in the *manner* he wills we should ask; a defect in the *form* of our prayers. Let us pray like the *woman of Canaan:* the *subject* of her petition was important; and in her *manner* of supplicating, she exercised every virtue that could interest the Saviour of the world in her behalf. Let us pray I repeat, like this woman, otherwise our prayers will be ineffectual; because in the first place we ask that which is inconsistent with the will of God; or, secondly, because the manner in which we ask is improper. These are the two heads of my discourse:—endeavour christians, to hear with profit.

PART I.

I. On the nature of those things which we request of the Almighty depends the excellence and efficacy of our prayers: we must therefore reflect

on the petitions we have offered, in order to attribute to its just cause the worthlessness and inefficacy of most of our addresses to God. On this subject we may derive much instruction from the story of the Canaanite, who is mentioned in our text.

In our prayers to God, we are continually soliciting those things which would obstruct our salvation, or requesting temporal blessings which have no tendency to promote our spiritual interest: or if we pray for even spiritual blessings, it is that we may so employ them, that they would become the means of seducing us from the path of salvation, rather than of effecting our sanctification.

We pray for those things that would obstruct our salvation:—the first obstacle which we oppose to divine mercy and which arrests its course. We must not imagine, my dear hearers, that the mere profession of christianity prevents us from falling into the practical errors of paganism. It was one of the enormities committed by pagans (if we believe the evidence of pagans themselves,) to petition their gods for favours which they would not have dared to ask of a virtuous man; which they could not, without blushing, have requested publickly in their temples. The death of a relation for instance, whose wealth they expected to inherit; the death of a competitor whose reputation

or merit gave them offence; the patrimony of a ward, whom their avarice would lead them to injure. Such were the petitions they offered; and, to render them more effectual, their prayers were accompanied with all the rites of a superstitious worship, with sacrifices and purifications. All this, christians, appears to us atrocious and absurd; but do we not, in condemning them, condemn ourselves also? If we compare their prayers and our own, do we not find ourselves as culpable as they? As culpable! nay, are we not still more culpable than they were?

For they, we must consider, were heathens, and the gods they worshipped were not only false gods, but, according to their own opinion, corrupt and vicious beings. In addressing such gods, was it not natural for them to request those things which favoured their vices, and encouraged the depravity of their morals? Was not the nature of their prayers the almost unavoidable consequence of their false religion? But, my brethren, we serve a God who is not less pure and holy than great and powerful; a God who is essentially adverse to all injustice, to all iniquity: and what do we solicit of this God of purity, holiness, and justice? The accomplishment of our most sensual desires, and the success of our most criminal undertakings.—This is not merely a practical error; it is a horrid impiety; a dreadful sacrilege!

The professors of christianity, I acknowledge, know how to varnish over their prayers, and to express them in less odious language; for we have learned the art of disguising every thing: but although, we may deceive ourselves, we do not deceive the God to whom we pray; he discerns without difficulty the offensive wishes which are couched in words the most inoffensive. In vain then does the worldly-minded suppliant implore the means of subsisting in his present condition of life, and of supporting his proper rank; for as the idea which he has formed of his proper rank, is derived from boundless ambition, or insatiable avarice, God, whose penetration is infinite, marks his designs, and exerts his power in their defeat. In vain does a father solicit the establishment of his children: his views with respect to those children being altogether worldly, and neither regulated by the dictates of conscience, nor directed by the divine will, the Almighty, disregarding his apparently humble prayer, instead of raising his family to affluence, inflicts a just punishment on his ambition, by annihilating all their prospects of advancement, and reducing them to indigence. In vain does the voluptuous female beseech the Almighty to restore her health: he foresees that health would serve but to encourage her indolence, and love of luxury, and probably to plunge her into licentious gratifications; he therefore removes not his hand, but lays on her still heavier afflictions, that she

may be deprived, by the langour of perpetual sickness, of all temptations to vanity and forbidden pleasures. In vain does the unjust man pray for the success of a cause, on which his whole fortune depends: God, who is not ignorant of the injustice of that cause, which is supported by chicanery and intrigue, tenderly regards the interest of the widow and the orphan, frustrates the designs of their oppressor, and covers him with disgrace.—It would take up too much time to pursue this subject to its full extent; but, my dear hearers, if you pursue it in your own minds, and apply what I have said to yourselves, you will soon perceive, that your hearts have in many instances seduced you, and led you to abuse the privilege of supplicating the Almighty, by praying for such things as would serve but to gratify your passions.

Still farther to enforce this idea, allow me to have recourse to the morality of virtuous heathens; for in one respect, it is more calculated for your conviction, than that of christian writers. Let me then be permitted to introduce a pagan author into this pulpit, and to repeat for your instruction, or for your confusion, the reproaches which he, in terms so strong and impressive, addressed to his cotemporaries.

"Tell me," said he, when lamenting the abuses of ancient Rome, and opposing those pagan devotees,

who wearied the gods with their unjust prayers; " tell me what you think of Jupiter, and how you estimate his character. Do you feel as much veneration for the greatest of the Gods, as for the wisest of your magistrates? You are astonished at the question; but it is a question, which I may with propriety ask: for, is it credible that you would enter the abode of a magistrate, whose virtue you respected, that you might offer to him the infamous petition which you have now addressed to Jupiter, in the most august of his temples? You imagine then, that Jupiter possesses less integrity, and is less incorruptible than a human being, when you believe him ready to listen to your prayer, and even to accomplish your desires?"

Thus spake an heathen; thus, by severe irony, did he reproach the enormities of heathenism: and probably by his reproaches they were corrected. Paganism then, christians, affords us instruction, and condemns our conduct.

For how do we in fact, regard the character of our God, the God of holiness? Is he the favourer of our vices? is he the accomplice of our crimes? On this principle we often act in our addresses to him, for when we pray, it is in the hope that God, from his mercy, his paternal goodness, will conform to our desires; that his will which is efficacious, and omnipotent, will concur with ours which is

destitute of power; in short, that he will accomplish whatever we wish, and without his assistance should wish ineffectually. If then, corrupted by the spirit of the world, instead of praying in the temper of christians, we pray for the gratification of our ambition, our pride, and our resentment, what do we solicit? We solicit the Almighty to assimilate his character to ours; to become vain, prejudiced and violent as ourselves; and for us, his creatures, to will that which he cannot will without ceasing to be our God. In prayers like these, do we not rather dishonour him, than treat him with the reverence due to our creator? Do we not as he complained by the prophet Isaiah, of the Jewish people; *make him to serve with our sins, and weary him with our iniquities!* And certainly christians, if God were to deviate from his holiness by granting our petitions, should we not ourselves view his compliance as a reason for distrusting his providence?

We are taught by the Apostle John, that *we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.* In the name of Jesus Christ we offer our supplications; but, to apply to our Saviour, what I have said concerning God, do we wish him to become the patron of that sensuality which reigns in our hearts? if not, why do we address the Almighty in his name, when our prayers arise from sensuality alone?

No, my brethren, it is not for this purpose that God, in the person of his son, has bestowed on us a mediator. Jesus Christ is the advocate of sinners, but he never was, he never can be the advocate of sin; and it is, if I may so speak, an annihilation of him, to employ his name as a sanction for our iniquities; for, instead of the author of grace and holiness, which he is represented by our religion, we make him, in defiance of his own will, the mediator of our vanity, our avarice, and our sensuality. Unless we attributed to the Redeemer this character, should we dare to employ his name, when we request those things which are inimical to the work of redemption? and when our minds are filled with projects of ambition, should we presume to regard as our intercessor, him who, to teach us humility, reduced himself to a state of the most profound humiliation?

Happy are we if, for our salvation, God remains inexorable to our prayers. By that apparent harshness, we ought to be convinced of his mercy; for what would be the effect of his indulgence to our sinful wishes? "By what was the ruin of the Pompeys and the Cæsars effected?" (Observe the eminent satirist, whose thoughts I scruple not to borrow, and whose writings are peculiarly applicable to ourselves;) "And by what "means is the ruin of whole families so frequently "brought about? Is it not effected by vast, un-

" bounded, and criminal desires, accomplished by " *deities* whose enmity is deep and destructive, " in proportion to the facility with which they " grant those desires?"* To render these words useful to ourselves, I ask—what has occasioned the reprobation of so many professors of christianity? Is it not their having obtained of the Almighty that, which he in his anger alone could bestow? Whence arises the destruction of so many worldlings, who in the midst of opulence and luxury, procure their own damnation, but from those gifts which God confers in compliance with their insensate wishes, rather than with the designs of his benignant Providence? You ask of the Almighty that which is intended to gratify your passions : can he, who foresees what will infallibly corrupt you, what will plunge you into the abyss, denounce severer judgment, and inflict more dreadful vengeance than by granting your request?

Although we may not, in all our addresses to God, solicit those things which obstruct our salvation, and encourage dispositions which are altogether inimical to our salvation, yet we often petition for temporal blessings alone, and which have no tendency to promote our spiritual interest. I do not assert that temporal blessings are not bestowed by God, nor that they are incompatible with sal-

* *Magnaque numinibus vota exaudita malignis.* JUVENAL.

vation. In what instances then do they become so, and when does the Almighty refuse to grant them? When we pray for them, neither according to the order which he has established, nor with a view to the object proposed by him.

All that we supplicate is of a worldly nature, and confined to the wants of the present life, whilst we scarcely think of those spiritual blessings on which salvation depends. Prosperity, tranquillity, the advantages of fortune—these are what we desire and seek after, and these are likewise the constant, the habitual objects of desire to unbelievers: *For after all these things do the Gentiles seek.* These are, I acknowledge, benefits; but they are perishable benefits, inadequate to the nature of men, especially of men who are christians; benefits replete with danger, and liable to be converted into injuries. As for solid, incorruptible blessings—purity of morals, peace of conscience, humility, faith, charity; all that can sanctify the soul and raise it to perfection—let us confess, and deeply humble ourselves whilst we make the confession, to these blessings we are almost insensible; for them we rarely approach the altar as suppliants. Which of you has ever had recourse to the Almighty for assistance in moderating his passions and regulating his life? Ah! my brethren, if we are afflicted with public calamities, if we are threatened with famine or pestilence, if

a dreadful mortality reigns amongst us, we throng the temple of the living God; every place resounds with our groans and supplications; but when licentiousness dishonours christianity and afflicts the church, we are tranquil and free from disquietude; instead of imploring heaven to suppress the daring impiety, we rest in careless and shameful indolence. Thus we pray like the wretched Antiochus whose selfish petition found no favour in the sight of God. *This wicked person vowed also unto the Lord, who now no more would have mercy upon him.* We cannot doubt that he prayed with the utmost fervor, but his prayer was that of the worldling; he asked of God neither repentance nor holiness, nor a veneration for the holy things which he had profaned; he prayed for health, which he preferred to every other blessing; therefore was the bosom of divine mercy shut against him. In like manner we supplicate, and supplicate in vain; for Jesus Christ never promised to be our advocate when we thus pray.

We learn from the Evangelist that the Son of God said to his disciples, *whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you.* Remark the expression, *whatsoever ye shall ask in my name,* by which Jesus Christ shews that what we ask must be a reality, must be something worthy of him,

otherwise it would not become his character to undertake our cause. All earthly enjoyments, unconnected with eternal salvation are as nothing in the sight of God; to pray, then, for those enjoyments is to ask nothing, and although the promise given by the Saviour of the world appears universal, they are not separately considered, comprehended in it. To be convinced of this, listen to what he afterwards says to his apostles: *hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name.* How could the Son of God thus address them, since it is evident they had made many requests to him? St. Peter had requested to dwell with him on mount Tabor; the children of Zebedee to be raised to the two highest places in his kingdom: they had, it is true, solicited favours of this nature, but these things were merely temporal benefits, and as in the opinion of our Saviour all temporal benefits were unworthy of regard, he considered it just to say, *hitherto have ye asked nothing.* In fact, to remain with him on mount Tabor, was but a gratification of sense which Peter wished to enjoy: to occupy the highest places in his kingdom was, according to the views of the two disciples, but a vain distinction in which their ambition took delight; for of that honour they had conceived a false idea: but zeal, fortitude under persecution, and self-denial, were essential blessings, of which they stood in need, to support, to animate, to perfect them in their

apostolic labours: these blessings they had never implored: *hitherto have ye asked nothing.* Of how many christians might I at this time make a similar complaint! and to how many, even of those who are now listening to me, might I not on the same principle address these words:—you, worldling, have hitherto asked nothing of your God, because you have never prayed that you might view the world with indifference and contempt. You, sinner, have asked nothing; immersed as you are in sin, you have never prayed for conversion, for an humble and contrite heart, for grace to overcome yourself, and renounce your sins: yet these are the blessings, the peculiar blessings you ought to desire and implore!

When the Saviour of the world assures us, in the gospel, that whatsoever we ask in his name shall be given us, he refers to that which we ask according to the rule prescribed by himself; for it is he who, by regulating our prayers and animating them with his spirit, endows them with the privilege of rising to the highest heavens, and touching the heart of God by representing our wants and miseries. What is that divine rule according to which the Son of God has commanded us to pray? *Seek ye first*, said he, *the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.* Ask of your heavenly

Father that his name may be hallowed, that his kingdom may come, that his will may be done; without praying first for the bread which is the support of your bodies, and then I will be your advocate: but if, unworthy of the profession you make, you are led by a love of the world, to seek first that bread before you pray for the kingdom of God, depend no longer on my merits, infinite as they are, since your prayer, however fervent, is inconsistent with the plan which I have marked out. *Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness.*

It is not then, christians, absolutely forbidden us to pray to God for temporal blessings; but let us not solicit them till we have, above all things, prayed for spiritual blessings. The righteous man and the votary of the world offer up their petitions at the same altar, but the prayer of one is that of a christian, the other that of a worldling. Does the former, then, ask of God only the blessings of his grace, and the latter only earthly blessings? No: it is possible that the good man may with spiritual blessings solicit also, like the worldling, the enjoyment of prosperity; and that the worldling with the enjoyment of affluence, may sometimes, like the good man, pray for spiritual blessings; but he who is led by the spirit of the world, places earthly prosperity before the gifts of grace; whilst he who is led by the spirit of God prefers

the gifts of grace to earthly prosperity. His petition is:—Lord, sanctify me; make me pure, charitable, merciful, patient, and grant me then such worldly blessings as may serve to promote my salvation. The man of the world, on the contrary, thus addresses the Almighty:—Lord, make me rich, great, and powerful; and refuse me not the grace essential to an honourable life.—Such is the prayer of the worldling: when we pray like him, ought we to wonder if God is deaf to our supplications?

To comprehend more fully on what foundation the important truth I am inculcating is established, let us seriously reflect, that our prayers are efficacious only as they are united with those of our Saviour; for of no one but Jesus Christ can it be said, that he is heard for the respect due to his own character. When God listens to our petitions it is not from the consideration either of what we are, or of what are our own deserts, since in ourselves we are nothing, and for ourselves we deserve nothing: he listens to us in consideration of his son, and because his son prayed for us before we were capable of praying for ourselves. How then could the Almighty accept our prayers when, in preference to the salvation of our souls, we solicit temporal blessings; since such petitions have no conformity, no union with the prayers of him who has taken upon him the office of our me-

diator? What are the blessings he has implored for us? That we may be united in the bond of charity; *that they may be one, as we are:*—that without ostentation, without disguise, we may be holy in spirit and in truth; *sanctify them through thy truth:*—that whilst we are living in the midst of the world in compliance with the duties of our calling, we may be watchful over our hearts, and happily preserve ourselves from the iniquity which prevails; *I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil.* But what are *our* requests? We ask of God wealth, honours, vain reputation, a life of ease; and these things we ask with no regard to salvation as our primary object: we solicit wealth but for the enjoyment of abundance; honours, merely for the enjoyment of splendour; reputation, only for the pleasure of being known and distinguished; a life of ease, but for the gratification of our senses: in a word, we ask that which Jesus Christ has never solicited for us. And why has he never made such requests in our behalf? Because his prayers could not be inconsistent with the object for which he was sent. He was sent to be a Saviour, and his mission was confined to the salvation of man; for this purpose alone it became him then to labour, and to suffer, and to merit reward; so, by a necessary consequence, it was for the salvation of man alone that it became him to pray.

Hence, christians, you ask and receive not, because you pray not with Jesus Christ; and were your prayers effectual, independently of their union with his, you might boast of blessings for which you owed no gratitude to your Saviour:—this, according to the maxims of the religion we profess, were blasphemy!

No, my brethren, do not deceive yourselves; let no man promise himself temporal felicity because he has the honour of belonging to Jesus Christ. Our Saviour has not chosen us, that he may confer on us worldly happiness. Without violating his word, he may leave us in a state of poverty, of humiliation, and of suffering. He has undertaken to present our supplications before the throne of God, but at the same time he requires that we should pray as christians, that we should pray for heaven, in which he has given us an inheritance. It was an excellent argument by which one of the fathers repelled the ridicule of the pagans. "You reproachfully tell us," he replied, "that notwithstanding our prayers we are living in penury and wretchedness: to justify ourselves as well as our God, it is sufficient to say, that our prayers are not addressed to heaven for the attainment of earthly blessings, but of the blessings of eternity. If then we are poor in this world, our poverty is no proof of the inefficacy of our prayers; on the contrary, it is an assurance

that those prayers will be answered elsewhere, and in a state of immortality. Herein we ought to admire the liberality of our God. He does not limit our favours to temporal benefits, because those benefits are unworthy of us; because they are incapable of satisfying our desires; because they are inadequate to both the dignity of our nature, and the value of our prayers. He is not willing to treat us like children, who are amused by trifles: he is not willing to treat us like those idolaters, whose moral virtues he rewards in this life with apparent happiness; he is resolved that he himself shall constitute our only happiness, our only recompence. Ah! my brethren, let us not err in the choice of our blessings. Let us hold fast the word of God; he has promised to give himself to us, and in order to obtain the accomplishment of that promise, let us ask of him no other blessing than himself. There are many who hope in God for happiness, but that happiness is not the enjoyment of God: let us beware of making a distinction so injurious to ourselves; as we can hope for nothing which we do not receive from God, so let us hope for nothing but God, or that which leads to God."

But the blessings which I have implored of the Almighty are not temporal, I pray for spiritual blessings; yet I receive them not. No, you receive them not, because even in these petitions you abuse the privilege of prayer. Possibly you are

not aware of this error, I shall therefore shew you in what it consists.

Instead of regarding prayer as the mean with which God has furnished us for the attainment of the blessings of salvation; that is, of graces which are real and attainable; graces which are solid, essential, and regulated according to the order of the divine decrees, we avail ourselves of it to solicit chimerical and superfluous graces, such as are suited to our taste and false ideas. I will explain myself. We have recourse to prayer, and in our own opinion we pray with a sincere desire of obtaining salvation; but from a mistaken confidence in the efficacy of prayer, we rely on that alone, as if prayer, without good works, were sufficient; as if salvation depended on prayer only; as if Jesus Christ when he said to us, *pray*, had not at the same time commanded us to watch and to act; as if there were graces to be obtained which could save us without our own exertions. We pray, and in our prayer we implore the blessing of a peaceful death, believing it sufficient to ask, without endeavouring to obtain it; without preparing ourselves for it by a holy life. We pray, and in our prayer we ask for repentance and sanctification; but these we solicit for the future, and not for the present; we solicit them as graces which will remove every difficulty, without leaving us efforts to make, and obstacles to overcome;

graces by which we shall be miraculously impelled, like the Apostle Paul; not those graces which gradually affect the mind, and with which we are obliged to co-operate; graces which will every where accompany us, of which we shall be certain on all occasions, and which will suffer us to expose ourselves to every situation; not those graces which we must carefully cherish in our hearts: in short, we supplicate those things which would change the order of Providence, which would derange the whole œconomy of our salvation.

Let us, christians, conclude the first part of this discourse with the prayer of the Psalmist: — *One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple.* One thing only I pray for, that only will I seek after, that I may dwell in the presence of my God, and eternally behold his glory.

Oh! my God, I now know the reason that thou hast so often rejected the prayers of thy servant. That the designs of thy mercy might be accomplished, it became me to request those things which should not be equally attainable by the wicked and idolatrous. It was thy will that my prayers should distinguish me from the enemies of thy name; yet I find that between their petitions

and mine, there has hitherto been little difference; although in imploring temporal benefits, they have usually been successful, whilst thou hast denied my requests, either because they were inimical to my salvation, or because they were made without regard to my salvation: but in thy denials, Lord, I still see thy mercy; for those worldly benefits which I implored, would have effected my destruction, and on the contrary, thy chastisements have been the means of correcting my faults. In obtaining earthly happiness, I should more easily have forgotten thee; if my requests had been granted, I should have imitated the example of others: I murmur not at thy refusals; I count myself happy, and I thank thee that thou hast blessed me, not according to my own desires, but according to thy wisdom, and with the design of effecting my salvation. Now, my God, thou wilt listen to my requests, for henceforward my prayers shall be for the blessings of eternity alone; or if I pray for temporal blessings, I will implore them but in subordination, and as they relate to those which are eternal: when I pray for spiritual graces, I will request those only which are truly beneficial, which will lead me most safely, most directly to everlasting felicity. Thus, christians, the words of Jesus Christ would be accomplished in us; we should ask and receive; but we receive not, because we ask *that which is inconsistent with the will of God;* (this we have considered under

the first head ;) or, because the *manner in which we ask is improper:* this is the second part of our discourse.

PART II.

II. There are certain qualifications which are indispensable to the success of our prayers: but however it may please the Almighty in his providence to deal with us, it would be an error, christians, a gross error to imagine that the conditions essential to prayer were an obstacle to the accomplishment of our desires, and a pretext used by God to procure the right of refusing to bestow his blessings. Heaven forbid, my brethren, that we should ever encourage this sentiment, for nothing can be more opposite to the conduct of our God. He whose mercy is not restrained, even when we provoke his anger; he who waits not for our request, but, according to the words of the royal prophet, hears *the desire of the humble;* he whose *ear is attentive even to the preparation of the heart*, cannot be indifferent when we call upon him with sincerity. Instead of sternly maintaining his greatness in the intercourse which he permits us to hold with him, we might rather doubt whether he does not relinquish too much of what is due to his character, and bear with too much condescension our weaknesses and imperfections. I affirm, that prayer must be accompanied by

certain qualities, to render it efficacious; but I maintain that we cannot on that account, accuse the Almighty either of limiting his promises, or of rendering his favours difficult of attainment; for, if we attentively examine the qualities required, we shall find that there is nothing which is not easy in practice; nothing the necessity of which is not demonstrated by our reason; nothing which men themselves do not exact from each other; and, as I have before observed, nothing which the woman in our text has not in the most striking manner exemplified.

For what, in fact, are the qualifications required by God, to render our prayers availing? *Humility*, *confidence*, *perseverance*, *an attentive mind*, and *an affectionate heart*. Are any of these qualifications, I will not say impracticable, but even painful or burthensome?

To pray with *humility;*—what can be more reasonable, what more natural? Can we have a just idea of the nature of prayer, yet omit this essential attribute? Do we address earthly monarchs without humility? Do we find it hard to render respect and homage to them when we have petitions to offer; and if by this respect and homage we obtain our wishes, do we complain that we have paid too high a price? Do we say they require too much for their favours, if those favours are

not granted to him who claims them with temerity and pride? Why then should we thus complain of our God, in whose presence it is far more reasonable, and consequently far more easy to humble ourselves, than in the presence of men? Did the woman of Canaan, mentioned in our text, find it difficult to prostrate herself humbly before Jesus Christ, and worship him? was it a violent effort to confess her unworthiness at his feet; and did she murmur at the repulses to which she was at first exposed? *It is not meet*, said the Saviour of the world, *to take the childrens' bread, and to cast it to dogs.* What comparison could be more humiliating? humiliating, however, as it was, did it afflict the Canaanite? nay, did she not own its justness? *Truth Lord.* Thus she prayed; but in what manner do we pray? She was a pagan, yet she humbled herself; we are christians, yet we offer up our petitions with a spirit of pride, of which we cannot divest ourselves even when we are forced to acknowledge our miseries and wants; and because that pride reigns in our hearts, we pray with presumption; we pray as if we had a right to claim favour and distinction from God, as if he were obliged to reward us for our prayers. To say nothing of that ostentation which often attends our sacrifices, and which instead of engaging the favour of God, induces him to punish us; to say nothing of that luxury which we retain even in the sanctuary; of that lofty and self-

complacent air which we there preserve; of those vain and careless attitudes which we there affect; all of which are inconsistent with the temper of suppliants, and render our prayers, as we are taught by the scriptures, abominable in the sight of God, since nothing is more hateful to him than the poor man that is proud:—not to mention these things, I would simply ask, in what manner do we supplicate favours of our God? We ask them not as favours, but as debts: if they are granted, we are ready to swell with pride; if refused, we are disposed to murmur and complain. We ask them to forget, when they are granted, that we received them of God; to possess and employ them without regard to him. Ought we then to wonder that his ear is not open to our petitions? Can we desire that he should grant our petitions at the expence of his own glory? Would it not be lavishing his blessings to shower them equally on the proud and the humble?

To pray with unshaken *confidence;*—what can be more reasonable? It is our God, our Sovereign, who, in his great mercy, not only commands us thus to pray, but even considers himself honoured by our reliance on him; who in various parts of scripture seems to attribute to our confidence, rather than to his own mercy (be not offended at this idea, it is perfectly just;) who seems to attribute, I say, to our confidence, rather than to

his mercy itself, the astonishing virtue of prayer; who says to the suppliant imploring his aid, not my kindness and power have saved thee, but *thy faith hath made thee whole.* What can be more for our interest, than this confidence in our God? Did not the Canaanite, although a heathen, in exercising it, experience its inestimable benefit? That ingenuous confidence in our Saviour which she shewed by first addressing him; *Have mercy on me O Lord:* the tender the affectionate manner in which she endeavoured to gain his attention; *thou son of David:* the importunities which she redoubled when the disciples rebuked her, and forbad her to speak: her faith in willingly renouncing the *childrens' bread,* provided she received but *the crumbs which fell from the table*;—in other words, her desire to procure but the smallest exertions of the Saviour's power, convinced that they would be sufficient to work the miracle she implored:—were not all these proofs of her firm reliance on him she invoked? How then would she have prayed if, instructed in the truths of christianity, she had known Jesus Christ as perfectly as we know him; if instead of believing him to be the *Son of David,* she had known him to be the *son of the living God?* Is it not true, however, that with all the knowledge derived from our religion, *we* scarcely ever pray with that simple, yet heroic sentiment recommended by the Apostle: *let him ask in faith, nothing wavering.* Although, to con-

quer our unbelief and mistrust, the Almighty has bound himself to us by the most solemn oath. Notwithstanding he has sworn by himself, there being, as St. Paul observes, *no greater by whom he could swear*; yet we suffer our unbelief and mistrust to prevail. We believe the word of man, but have little reliance on the word of God: we pray, but whilst we pray our hearts are torn with vain anxieties, and we are secretly tempted to despair: we have recourse to our God, but not till every support has failed; not till we are in the last extremity: we depend less on God than on ourselves, and rely more on our prudence than on our prayers. This blindness justifies the conduct of our God when he delays stretching out his arm for our assistance.

To pray with *perseverance*:—What can be more proper? May not the Almighty who is Lord of the blessings he bestows, and who alone has a right to the disposal of them, attach what value he pleases to his gifts; and are not those gifts sufficiently valuable to deserve our repeated, our continued supplications? When Jesus Christ by his silence made trial of this tender mother, when he *answered her not a word;* when he appeared resolved, by an apparently harsh and humiliating reply, to drive her from his presence, declaring to his disciples, in her hearing, that he was *not*

sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel, did she then cease to supplicate, to importune? No, christians, the resistance of Jesus Christ increased her perseverance; and her perseverance triumphed over his resistance: from her first addressing our Saviour she appears to have comprehended his design; and in the necessity to which she was reduced of contending with him,(if I may so speak) by opposing to his apparent harshness the real ardor of holy firmness, she although a stranger, obtained the right of being treated as an Israelite: she procured the miracle of her daughter's deliverance, and the approbation of our Saviour. Despair not then christians, you who have begun to *wrestle with God* by prayer; it is his will that you should *give him no rest.* He takes pleasure when you at length prevail over him.

Alas! my brethren, uninfluenced by these sentiments, how little do we discover of the *perseverance* exemplified in the prayer of the Canaanite? We grow weary of confessing to our God that we are *poor and needy,* and that we require his succour: the constant supplication which he demands appears to us a restraint, a cause of disgust and impatience: we would receive the fulfilment of our desires for the first petition we offer, forgetting the great maxim of the wise man, to *wait for the mercy of God.*

To conclnde:—To pray with *attention* and *affection:*—What can be more essential, what more indispensable to prayer? An *attentive mind*, an *affectionate heart;*—these constitute the very soul of prayer, without which it can no more exist than a body without the spirit which gives it life and animation: for what is prayer? Let us not consult theology for the reply, but merely good sense and the opinion which is generally entertained of that holy exercise. What, I ask, is prayer? It is intercourse with God, in which the soul, admitted into the sanctuary, lays its wants before the Almighty, confesses its weaknesses, represents its temptations, and implores his mercy. Do not these things demand reflection and sensibility? If then at the time I am addressing my God I suffer my mind to becomc dissipated, and voluntarily lose the spirit of seriousness and devotion, whatever else I may do, I no longer *pray*. Were I to celebrate the praises of the Lord, were I to pass whole nights in devotion, were I to prostrate myself and remain, as it were, rivetted to the earth, the moment my spirit ceased to be attentive, I should cease to *pray*.

Hence, my brethren, we may justly remark, although we must acknowledge it with the deepest concern, that since mental abstraction is essential to

prayer, the exercise of prayer is almost annihilated amongst christians; for if supplication is sometimes made, it is made without reflection. Our piety is reduced to the recital of a few words, uttered with a careless and distracted mind. *Our lips move,* not like those of the mother of Samuel, whom the high priest rashly judged, but like those of the Jews, whom the Almighty reproached with *having their hearts far from him.* Thus are the generality of our prayers full of hypocrisy; and Jesus Christ might well say to us, as he said to the Pharisees: *Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, this people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me.* It is not the professedly careless alone who fall into this error, and who from a fatal ignorance perpetually pray without the spirit of prayer, that is, without recollecting whom they are addressing, and what they are imploring: men of enlightened minds, and even the ministers of God, are guilty of this awful abuse, by offering up prayers without praying in their hearts, and by debasing a holy exercise instead of carrying it to perfection by habitual use.

It is not without reason then, that God rejects our petitions, since they partake so little of the spirit of prayer: instead of honouring, they offend him, and draw down his displeasure. You

require that God should attend, when you are inclined to pray; yet in addressing him you will not yourself attend to God. What injustice my dear hearer: you exclaim, like the prophet: *give ear to my words, Oh! Lord: hearken unto the voice of my cry;* but, at the same time you direct your mind to other objects. You call on God to listen to you, yet you listen not to him; you listen not even to yourself, nor comprehend your own words.

Let us, christians, reform our conduct in this instance, and our whole lives will be reformed; for he who can pray well, can act well. Why are we the subjects of so many vices? Because we pray not, or because we pray improperly: and why, it may be asked, do we omit praying, or pray amiss? Because we are unwilling to relinquish our vices; because we fear the healing hand. Let us ask of God *those things worthy of him;* let us ask them in a *manner* worthy of him, and worthy of us, and we shall obtain our requests. Amongst the blessings we implore, let us above all solicit the gift of prayer, saying like the apostles: *Lord, teach us to pray.* Ah! Lord, such is our weakness, that without thine assistance we cannot rightly express our wants, nor ask thine aid. It is thine to make us sensible of our miseries; it is thine to lead us to thy footstool, there to deplore them; it is thine to teach us how we must move thy pity. Grant us

therefore, Oh God! this essential knowledge; and by that grace from which, as from their source, all other graces are derived, teach us to use the privilege of prayer, that we may obtain the blessings of conversion, sanctification, and salvation; which lead to the enjoyment of eternal glory.

SERMON V.

ON THE RECOMPENSE OF THE SAINTS.

[Preached on *All Saints Day*, before LEWIS XIV.]

MATTHEW v. 12.

Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven.

IT is the son of God who speaks, and who in the words of our text, displays the glory of heaven, not as a mere inheritance which devolves to us, but as a recompense which we must labour to obtain.

Our Saviour knowing that self love is natural, acts towards us with a condescension worthy of himself, and attracts us to his service by the views of our interest. Without relinquishing his rights, without retracting, in any degree, the command he has given us to love him as our God, to love him for his own sake, and in preference to ourselves, he still permits us to receive advantage from our love to him; and, provided we are not servilely attached to self-interest, he consents that we should love him with a view to our interest; or, to speak

more properly, that we should make our interest to consist in loving him: therefore he has promised us a reward sufficient to inspire us with that pure and perfect love which unites our interest with that of God.

Let us then, my dear hearers, enter into the views of Jesus Christ; and, without affecting a spirituality more sublime, than that which is taught us by our adorable master, let us fix our regards on the recompense which he has offered us, and to which he has called our attention in these words: *great is your reward in heaven.* It is the precept of the gospel, that we ought to labour to obtain recompense Laying down this principle then, as a truth of which we are not at liberty to doubt, I shall proceed to shew how highly worthy is the reward proposed of our earnest desire and pursuit. I shall point out its excellence and advantages; and by comparing it with the rewards of the world, teach you to appreciate, and if possible excite in you a holy zeal to abtain it.

The recompense prepared by God for his elect, is a certain recompense: it is promised by God himself, and if you desire it with sincerity, it is yours. This recompense is abundant; its measure is the munificence of God; it is of itself sufficient to accomplish all your desires. Lastly; it is an eternal recompense; a recompense which you

will never lose because it is reserved for you in heaven, where there will be no more vicissitude. These excellencies, my brethren, are well calculated to make the strongest impression on your understanding and heart; especially if you consider the essential difference, which I entreat you to remark, between the rewards conferred by the world, and the reward received by the people of God. The *first* point of difference which I shall notice is, that the reward promised by our Saviour is *sure*, whilst the rewards conferred by the world are *uncertain*. *Secondly;* the reward promised by our Saviour is *abundant*, whilst the rewards of the world are empty and defective. *Lastly;* the reward promised by our Saviour is *eternal*, whilst the rewards of the world are transient and perishable.

These are three subjects of consolation and joy which we may derive from viewing the glory of the saints in heaven, and which should animate us to follow their example. *Rejoice, and be exceeding glad*, for if you imitate their example, you will certainly, you will be fully, you will be eternally rewarded. On the other hand, weep and lament if, notwithstanding these advantages, you are fascinated by a love of the world, and feel little desire for the reward of the righteous; and not only weep, but tremble if the hardness

of your hearts renders you insensible to truths so affecting.

Grant me grace, Oh! Lord, that I may worthily and profitably treat this important subject: grant that those who hear me, influenced by the power of thy divine word, may conceive an ardent desire, a lively hope, a holy foretaste of the blessings which thou hast prepared for thy people. In anticipation of those ineffable blessings, may they detach their hearts from earth; may their thoughts be fixed on heaven; may they renounce all vanity; may they seriously inquire after truth; may they be determined to combat and to overcome the world.

PART I.

I. To weary, to exhaust, and frequently to sacrifise themselves for uncertain rewards; rewards which are hard to be obtained, and of which, after cherishing vain hopes, they are continually deprived by unfortunate disappointment, or unjust exclusion, is the melancholy lot of those who attach themselves to the world. On the contrary, to labour for a sure reward, and to serve a master by whom they may with certainty believe, no effort ever was, or ever will be disregarded, has at all times been the happiness of the saints. They have served a God faithful in his promises;

they have kept in view the recompense which could not fail : hence they were capable of doing and of suffering all things. *I also suffer these things*, exclaimed St. Paul, filled with the heroic energy which faith in truths the most consolatry, inspired. Although I suffer, so far from repining, I glory in afflictions: *for I know mhom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.* What was that which the Apostle had committed unto him? It was the treasure of christian virtues which he had acquired ; that is to say, it was all that he had done and suffered for God in hope of that glory with which his apostolic labours would, he knew, be rewarded. This is the literal sense of the passage. In the same Epistle to Timothy, he adds, *I have fought a good fight ; I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Hencefortb there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge shall give me at that day.* Thus spake the Apostle of Jesus Christ, and every true christian has a right to use the same language, since Paul himself acknowledged that the crown of righteousness was not laid up for him alone, but without exception, for all the servants of God : *and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.*

In applying to ourselves the words of the Apostle, *I know whom I have believed,* we should thus reason. I know that all I do, and all I suffer for God, is a sacred deposit which he will keep for me, for which he will be responsible, and which will not perish in his hands. *I know whom I have believed:* although I cannot rely on myself, yet I can rely on the God whom I serve : I am confident of his goodness, of his fidelity, of his power ; and the full assurance which my faith inspires in these attributes of God, encourages aud animates me. This assurance kept alive the zeal of those who, by their virtues, sanctified the earth, and who now reign in heaven. They relied with confidence on the God whom they served, and the blessings which he had promised to bestow : they not only believed, but knew, knew assuredly, that their hope in him would not be confounded.

The worldling is far from being able to speak thus decidedly of the world, and the rewards conferred by the world. Satisfied with the testimony of his own conscience, he may often deplore his hard fate : I know, he may say, that with respect to the world, I have done what is right, yet I know not whether the world will reward me, whether it will acknowledge and accept my services. In reference to his claim on the rewards of the world, he may say without presumption, I have confidence in myself, but I cannot rely on

them by whom favours are dispensed; I am not assured that their disposition towards me is friendly; I am not assured that it is even equitable. He may say, in a sense opposed to that of St. Paul, *I know whom I have believed:* I know,—too well I know that world to which I have unhappily attached myself, in which I have obstinately trusted; and from that knowledge I am altogether uncertain of reward; for sad experience compells me to learn, that from such a world, I can have no assured expectation of that reward to which I have a claim. To be thus deprived of hope and anticipation, constitutes the misery of the worldling; and in proportion to the power of ambition over his mind, fills him with torment. Herein, my brethren, consists the first difference I proposed to shew between the rewards of our God and those of the world. Let us further investigate the subject, for nothing can have a greater tendency to make us adore the mercy of our God, and to inspire us with an ardent love of holiness.

In the world there are unfruitful services, that is to say, services which find no reward. What is the reason? There are some services with which men are unacquainted; there are others which, though known, are unacceptable: there are services which gain the approbation, and awaken the sensibility of our fellow creatures, which yet remain unrecompensed, because they

have it not in their power. We have here three causes of uncertainty with respect to earthly rewards, but which serve at the same time to convince us of the certainty, the infallibility of that recompense which God has prepared for his elect.

There are services *unknown* to men. How many are the worthy actions which are lost, which are unknown, which are forgotten, which are effaced by time, or annihilated by the efforts of malignity:—it would be endless to pursue this thought. With respect to God, however, we have none of these things to fear: whatever be the virtues which, from a regard to his authority, we acquire, he knows, he distinguishes them; he weighs them in the balance of the sanctuary; he invariably preserves the remembrance of them.

Guided by the clear light of his divine intelligence, he beholds obscure, as well as splendid virtues; sees interior and hidden, as well as acknowledged and admired excellence. Many are the saints in heaven whose characters were never known, whose exemplary holiness never shone forth whilst they lived on earth. What a subject of consolation for the humble.

God, the searcher of hearts, examines the seat of virtue, the heart: that virtue dwelling in the heart, undiscernible as it is by men, is apparent,

altogether apparent to him; therefore he has respect not only to our actions, but to our intentions and desires; not only to what we do, to what we suffer, to what we relinquish for his sake, but likewise to what we are desirous of doing, suffering, and relinquishing. According to the Psalmist, he hears, and by the same rule he rewards, even *the preparation of the heart:* in other words, to please him it is sufficient to be desirous of pleasing him; to be endowed with his blessings, it is sufficient to obtain his approbation. How many of the elect have acquired no other worth in the sight of God than that of pious intention. What consolation for the feeble.

God is infinite in penetration, and nothing escapes his knowledge, therefore the least, the meanest of our actions, if his will be the motive, is valuable in his sight. A cup of cold water given in his name claims that glorious reward which he has himself promised. The widows' mite was in his sight, a more excellent gift than the magnificent offerings presented in the temple. What consolation for the poor.

God is strictly and supremely just, he therefore apportions to every degree of holiness which we acquire, a degree of glory; and this difference of degrees constitutes amongst the saints, as well as amongst the angels, the admirable order of the

celestial hierarchy. On earth the most exalted merit is not always placed in the most advantageous situation: from the erroneous judgment of mankind, mediocrity often rises to the highest honour. In heaven, virtue and reward will ever be inseparable. God himself proportions the one to the other; God, who is incapable of error, incapable of prejudice, incapable of esteeming any thing which is not essentially estimable, any thing except piety and good works. What consolation for the upright in heart, who are faithful in the performance of their duty.

In the world there is no merit which is not effaced by time. All that we do for the sake of our God, as soon as it is done, is recorded in the book of life, in characters that can never be effaced. Men, not only forget, but frequently are glad to forget the services we render them; but our God declares that our services are sealed up amongst the treasures of his mercy, that our sacrifices are ever in his sight, that our prayers and our alms rise up before him, and are ever remembered by him: *thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.* He even glories, if I may so speak, in the remembrance of them, and he can no more forget them, than he can forget that he is our God, and that we are his people. Christians, do we believe this truth? If not, we are unacquainted with the master we

serve: or if we sincerely believe it, why are we so cold, so negligent in his service?

To behold, in a stronger light, the felicity of the righteous, let us attend to the second cause of our disappointment in this world. There are services, which, though *known*, are *unacceptable*. Amongst men, do we not often see worth which is unfortunate, worth which is repulsed, worth which is condemned? Do we not behold excellencies which, from the alienation of hearts, and the contrariety of interests, far from attracting benevolence and love, excite jealousy and hatred? To these misfortunes those who labour to obtain the favour of God, are not liable. As God necessarily hates iniquity, and in hating, cannot but condemn it; so from his very nature, he must love christian virtues, and in loving, he cannot but reward and glorify them. In the people of God there are different degrees of excellence, but none of them are unacceptable to the Almighty; none of them fail to obtain his approbation; for they are all emanations from that original and exemplary holiness which is in God; they are all the operation and the gift of God. To possess merit, or to possess a high degree of merit, frequently serves only to exclude from the employments and situations which are the rewards conferred by the world. In the sight of God, the highest excellence has the strongest claim to love; and to be be-

loved by God, whose love constitutes the blessedness of the saints, is to be already recompensed.

Lastly: how just, how grateful soever men may be; nay, I will add, how generous, how munificent soever they may be, there are virtues which they do not reward, because they have not sufficient power: they acknowledge, they are affected by those virtues, but because they exceed, either in nature or in number, the favours which they have the power of dispensing, they are compelled to regard them as burthensome and importunate. There are no virtues, O! my God, thus regarded by thee; in thee we can apprehend no defect of power. Since the munificence of our creator is boundless, being inseparable from his unlimited power, our virtues may for ever multiply without exhausting his rewards; as our virtues increase, so increase the treasures of grace and glory which he will bestow upon us; his riches increase, in proportion to our claims: he *is rich*, says the holy scripture, *unto all that call upon him;* and still more so, we may add, to all that serve him with fidelity.

We may firmly rely on our God; and when we are engaged in his service, in the hope of that glory enjoyed by the saints, sinners as we are, we may have the consolation of saying like the apostle Paul, this *hope maketh not ashamed:* all other

hope is fallacious, but this will never deceive. How often have I repented that I depended too much on men; that I expected too much from them? but I dare not complain, that my God has ever disappointed my hopes; and were I so ungrateful as to murmur against him, not only his justice, but even his mercy, would rise up against me.

I am assured of my God. From this confidence the royal Psalmist was led to make those pious and edifying reflections, which a christian, especially at the court, ought to repeat every day of his life: *It is better to trust in the Lord, than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the Lord, than to put confidence in princes.*

I am assured of the God whom I serve:—interesting reflection, which alone can sanctify my life! My hope in God, cannot make me ashamed. I have nothing to fear, but from my own weakness, and want of confidence; but if I can rely on my God, I have a right to expect every thing from him.

Are we then excusable, my brethren; are we not rather most unworthy of our God, if we act towards him with reserve; if we fear to do too much for his sake, if we serve him not as God!

Eager as you are for those rewards, which, from so many causes, may fail, how can you justify the profound, the awful state of forgetfulness, in which you live of that supreme reward promised by the Almighty? How will you answer at the judgment day, when he reproaches you for an oblivion so criminal? This is the great error of which you are guilty, and if you do not mourn over it, I may justly repeat to you the dreadful malediction of the prophet Jeremiah: *cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm.* Still heavier is the curse on him who, having once trusted in man, cannot resolve to put his confidence in God. This you will see more clearly, in considering the second characteristic of the recompense of the saints, which is not only *sure* and *infallible*, but also *full* and *abundant: great is your reward.*

PART. II.

II. I call that recompense *abundant* which exceeds, or at least equals the services by which we have rendered, or endeavoured to render ourselves worthy of it: I call that a full and abundant recompense, which is of itself capable of satisfying the heart of man, capable of filling the vast extent of human desires, capable of rendering man happy, and giving him full content. In these respects the Son of God alone, has a right to make

the promise in our text, *great is your reward;* because he alone, is able to give a recompense to which these properties are attached: in other words, because nothing but that recompense appointed for the elect of God, can be justly considered a full and abundant reward.

Is it not true, (I begin with the first characteristic of this reward, and without any other proof, I need only appeal to your own knowledge;) is it not true that he who attaches himself to the service of the world, if he would avoid disappointment, must resolve to labour much for a small reward; and is it not on the other hand, incontestibly evident, that in the service of God, we are infinitely rewarded for the little we perform? Let us profit by this comparison, and learn from it to appreciate our religion.

What strenuous endeavours do we not daily make to obtain those favours of which the world disposes at so high a price? Those favours we ardently desire and impatiently expect, but when obtained, we perceive them to be far below the value of what it has cost to possess them. What sufferings, what fatigues, do we not undergo, to arrive at situations, which our imagination had represented as replete with great advantages? Yet as soon as we arrive at those situations, we are undeceived, and look around with disappointment

and disgust. To what dangers do we not expose ourselves, without sparing even our lives, for the sake of acquiring that worldly glory, which is but a fleeting phantom; which we no sooner enjoy, than we feel its vanity and nothingness? What anxiety do we not feel, what exertions do we not make, to procure the favour of the great, which frequently confers no benefit, although we have sacrificed to it our repose and our liberty? To how many worldlings amongst the professors of christianity, might we not justly say, as God by the prophet said to the Israelites, when shewing the fatal consequences of their unbelief: *ye have sown much, and bring in little.* That is to say, you have disquieted yourselves, you have made great efforts, you have been guilty of many base actions; yet all these have led to acquirements, which have neither corresponded to your hopes, nor equalled your expectations. In labouring for the world, you have sown in an ungrateful soil, which, whatever you may have expected, has rendered you but little fruit: *ye have sown much, and bring in little.*

Far different is the lot of the righteous. In serving the Almighty, they are, I am aware, exposed to trials and afflictions; but in the midst of these, they have the happiness of saying with the great Apostle: *I reckon that the sufferings of this present time, are not worthy to be compared*

with the glory which shall be revealed in us. We suffer, it is true; but not only do we endure affliction for righteousness sake, which of itself confers the happiness of reward; not only do we endure affliction for the sake of our God, which is itself a foretaste of blessedness, but what we suffer is by no means comparable with the glory that God has prepared for us; and it is our consolation that the least degree of that glory will repay us fully, and with interest, for all that is laborious and painful in the way to its attainment.

Such is the happiness of the righteous. *He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.* The righteous go forth with tears of salutary compunction, casting on the earth the precious seeds of their virtues; but they are consoled by the assurance that they shall soon return rejoicing and triumphant, with the plentiful harvest they have gathered; that is, with the immense treasures of glory which are to be the reward of those trivial sacrifices they make for God. They possess their souls in patience, rejoicing in the hope that they shall soon hear those transporting words: *thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.* My dear hearers, we serve a God, not only faithful to his promises, but munificent in his rewards.

All his rewards are worthy of a God: without waiting for that eternal life which he has promised, he already rewards us an hundred fold for all that we do for his sake, in the consolation we experience from having performed our duty. Hence, we derive the second idea of an *abundant* recompense.

I have said that this reward is of itself capable of satisfying the heart, and that this excellence could be attributed only to the recompense of the saints. Does the assertion require proof? Was there ever a truth more calculated to oblige us, notwithstanding our reluctance, to seek the kingdom of God? It is true, we see men who, according to the maxims of the world, appear amply recompensed; we see some whose reward even exceeds their services; but do we see any, can we hope to see any, who are content? And without contentment what avail their pretended rewards? Possibly they abound in wealth and honours, and the world seems exhausted to raise them to the height of prosperity: nevertheless, are they really satisfied? do they desire nothing more? do they in their prosperity, in their apparent happiness, find true felicity? Who can recount the number of those who have attained to affluence, but to be more unhappy, to feel their sorrows more keenly? The world spared nothing which could satisfy their ambition; but with the favours of the world

were mixed those seeds of bitterness inseparable from them, and which were soon to produce the fruits of misery. The world, in rendering them powerful and opulent, gave all it could bestow; but it could not give that satisfaction, that peace of mind, without which neither power nor opulence could divest their situation of its sorrows: how happy soever they might appear, many things were wanting to their happiness. You will say, the blame arose from themselves alone, since they were unhappy, only because they were insatiable: but why, notwithstanding the favours heaped on them by the world, were they still insatiable; unless it be an acknowledged, a certain, an eternal truth, that the gifts of the world, however liberal, can never satisfy an immortal soul.

Hence, christians, I infer the excellence, the perfection of the recompense prepared for the elect of God: for we are taught by our faith that this recompense alone can fill the immensity of our hearts; that we shall find in this recompense the accomplishment of all our desires; that it will be a state of consummate bliss: in a word, that with this recompense, insatiable as we are, we shall be fully satisfied. *I shall be satisfied,* said the Psalmist, *when I awake with thy likeness.* As if he had said, till that time, O! Lord, whatever the world may bestow upon me, I shall continually suffer the miseries of want: till that time,

weary of being what I am, I shall continually wish to be what I am not: till that time my heart, filled with vain desires, and destitute of real blessings, will be in continual agitation and distress: but when thou hast made me a partaker of thy glory, my contented heart will enjoy tranquillity; I shall no longer feel the ardent thirst of sensuality; I shall no longer suffer the insatiable hunger of ambition. All my desires will cease, for in thy glory I shall find the fulness of happiness, the fulness of repose, the fulness of joy: the possession of that glory will exempt me from all evil, and enrich me with all good: *I shall be satisfied, when I awake with thy likeness.*

Were these words of David designed to exaggerate, or were they uttered in a sudden transport of feeling? No, christians; the Psalmist expressed the ruling sentiment of his mind; and we should not be surprized that, with a conviction of the truth I am announcing, he used this strong expression, *I shall be satisfied;* since he knew that the glory and reward of the righteous, to which he aspired, was nothing less than the enjoyment of God. *I am thy exceeding great reward,* said the Almighty to his servant Abraham. Besides me, no reward is compleat; all my glory without the possession of myself would be insufficient for thee. I am essential to thy happiness, therefore I promise thee no other recompense than myself: *I am*

thy exceeding great reward. It is easy to imagine that the enjoyment of God may produce in man that satisfaction which David expresses. The enjoyment of God is the whole of that incomprehensible felicity which the saints will obtain in heaven. They will possess thee, O! my God; *they shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures. For with thee is the fountain of life.* This, christians, I repeat, will be our reward: amidst the sufferings which overwhelm us in this vale of tears, this is the object of our hope, and our faith. But possibly, sensual as we are, we comprehend it but imperfectly: possibly, you to whom I speak, have need that your faith should be sustained and fortified by some present and visible effect.

You require a sensible effect of that which your religion teaches you to believe on the subject: this, my brethren, let us point out. All that I have described not only will be accomplished, but is even now in some measure, accomplished in the hearts of the righteous. *Great is your reward.* We are convinced that the elect will be satisfied with the possession of God, by seeing those who, in the present life, animated by a spirit of piety, renounce every other enjoyment, and consider themselves happy in the possession of God alone. Not to speak of glorified saints, we behold *the ex-*

cellent of the earth, who already enjoy this happiness in some degree. There are few, I own, who have attained to such perfection; but some there are, some perhaps known to yourselves; men disengaged from the world; who have relinquished all for God, and who find every thing in God; men who, like David, can say; *whom have I in deaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee:* or even going beyond the Psalmist, can say, not only, *I shall be satisfied*, but I am *now* satisfied with the foretaste only of thy glory. Yes, my brethren, we see examples of this kind; and the Almighty places them before our eyes for our condemnation, if we regard them not for our edification.

This contentment, notwithstanding the iniquity which prevails, is produced by the grace of God, in those zealous christians who sanctify the earth by their virtues. We find no worldly-minded men content with the world, yet we find the servants of the most high, satisfied with the God to whose service they are devoted. What more is needful to awaken our piety? We see no rich men satisfied with their riches, yet we see poor christians satisfied with their poverty. We see no ambitious men satisfied with their elevation, yet we see men truly humble, who are satisfied with their lowly state. We find no sensual men, satisfied with their enjoyments, yet we find men

crucified to the world, who are content with their afflictions and crosses. In short, we find those beatitudes of Jesus Christ, apparently so paradoxical and so incredible, evidently verified: we find men who, from a regard to the will of God and an ardent desire to please him, rejoice in suffering, rejoice in weeping, rejoice in being destitute of all things; who in the midst of their sufferings, still possess God, whilst the men of the world, with all their prosperity, with all their false pleasures, are dissatisfied and unhappy.

To possess God as their portion and reward is the felicity of those who seek him in sincerity and purity of heart. May I be permitted christians, to testify that, sinful and unworthy as I am, the Almighty by his grace has repeatedly enabled me to taste this felicity. How many times, O! my God, have I partaken of the abundance of those heavenly consolations of which thou art the source, and which in this earthly state are anticipations of glory! How often, satified with thee, have I despised all other enjoyments, and counted the world as nothing! Then didst thou banish from my heart all vain delights, and fill it with thy presence; hence Lord, the privation of those delights was more satisfactory than the possession of them ever was, or ever could have been. If in this state of exile, where I behold thee dimly through the veil of faith, thou already fillest my

heart, what felicity wilt thou bestow in that happy country where I shall see thee *face to face!* If, having quitted the world to follow thee, I already esteem myself rich in the poverty to which thou hast called me, what enjoyments may I hope from the riches that are found in thine abode! If it be so great a blessing to suffer for thy sake, what will it be to reign with thee!

The recompense of the saints is *abundant* as well as certain; this we have endeavoured to prove. Let us proceed *lastly*, to shew that it is an *eternal* recompense: *great is your reward in heaven.*

PART III.

III. To contend like the wrestlers of ancient times, to run the race of salvation *set before us*, is that, according to St. Paul, which is our indispensible duty: *So run that ye may obtain. And every man*, said the great Apostle, *that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things.* He hereby teaches us that as the wrestlers practised the severest self-denial, we ought, as christians, to detach ourselves from all worldly objects. *Now they do it*, he adds, *to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.* The reward is essentially different, and will be the cause of our condemnation if we follow not their example. The *third* and *last* motive, my dear hearers, from

which the saints derive not only energy and courage, but an entire freedom from the world in those combats they are required to sustain, is the immortality, the eternity, the incorruptibility of that crown, reserved for them in heaven; compared with the perishableness, the fragility, the short duration of earthly rewards.

In fact, to continue a comparison so just, so fruitful, and employed with such effect by the Apostle; all earthly rewards are perishable, and not only are they destined at some future period to fail, but they are continually dissappearing from our sight. Of how many, alas! have we witnessed the extinction! Of how many fortunes do we now see but the melancholy wreck! How many times, since we have been spectators of the vicissitudes of the world, might we exclaim with the Prophet: *I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree: Yet he passed away, and lo, he was not, yea, I sought him, but he could not be found!* We see many who now appear firmly established, who are the elect of the world; and where is the man that dares to promise himself a more happy lot, more durable felicity than theirs? Yet who can tell whether they who are arrived at the pinnacle of happiness and honour, are not about to be hurled from their eminence, and to prove by their downfall that the world has nothing certain,

much less that it has any thing eternal, to bestow on its adherents! Not to speak of death, which is the end of all, with how many changes and dissappointments are earthly favours attended!

This argument, christians, is surely sufficient to withdraw you from the world, notwithstanding all its attractions; and to compel you, if not altogether destitute of faith, effectually to seek the recompense of the righteous. The instability of fortunes acquired in the world; the difficulty of preserving, the danger, and fear of losing them; the misery and despair produced by the loss of them; the anxieties and vicisitudes to which they who possess them are exposed, would, I repeat, be almost sufficient to persuade the worldling, sensual as he is, would he seriously reflect, to seek blessings more solid.

In short, were men frequently to make these reflections, they would no longer need our remonstrances; scarcely would they require even the word of God as a remedy for that worldly ambition which is their ruin. Convinced of the erroneousness, the folly of their conduct, their own minds would suggest much more than we could say on the subject. If they whom we have known most eager for temporal rewards had foreseen the event, had anticipated the shortness and uncertainty of those worldly establishments which they consi-

dered as the fruit of their labours; had it been possible to foretell the exact term of their enjoyments, and to say to them, you will possess all these things but a very few years; never, my dear hearers, would the desire of rising to worldly honour have been their ruling passion, and their most dangerous temptation. I will go further; they would never have prevailed on themselves to do all that they did, and to take so much pains for so small a reward. Let us deplore their blindness, and avoid their error. They resigned themselves to ambition, only because they had never attentively examined the narrow limits of earthly possessions; they aspired to earthly rewards with so much ardour, only because they had banished from their memory the short duration of those rewards; only because they had dissipated their thoughts, that they might avoid reflection. Had they seriously and habitually considered the termination of earthly rewards, they would have enjoyed them, according to the injunction of St. Paul, *as if they enjoyed them not;* they would have been ever impressed with the thought, *that the world passeth away, and the lust thereof.*

The reward of the righteous alone passeth not away; for the righteous will live for ever, and their recompense is in God, who cannot change. The reward of the righteous alone, is immutable and in-

variable; for it consists in the happiness they receive from seeing, loving, and possessing God: they will see him, they will love him, they will possess him to all eternity. As the sufferings of the damned will arise from their being deprived of God, and eternally feeling the loss of God, the beatitude of the saints, on the contrary, will arise from the certainty that they shall never lose their God, that they shall be for ever united to him. Such is the reward, of them who devote themselves to the service of the Almighty. A kingdom is prepared for them; an eternal kingdom, in which there will be no succession, no vicissitude: a crown awaits them; a crown endowed with a privilege conferred on no earthly crown, that of being perpetual: they will reign like God; they will reign for ever: this eternity of power is the recompence of them who suffer, and who humble themselves for the sake of their God. They will be filled with joy; with joy which will never terminate; with joy which will never be disturbed nor interrupted; a joy which will endure, as long as God himself. This eternity of happiness, is the recompense of them who are lowly in heart, who renounce themselves, and by their humility, become *great in the sight of God*, of whose glory they will be partakers: they will enjoy glory which will never be diminished, nor obscured; which will be ever new, which will receive augmented lustre from the lapse of ages; an eternity of glory!

The honour in which the memory of the righteous is held, may be called a ray of their eternal glory, an anticipation of the eternity of their reward. The glory of the worldly-minded gradually expires, and is buried with them: they gained a transient celebrity, but their time was limited, and *their memorial is perished with them.* How many of those who were once the great ones, the heroes of the earth, are spoken of and remembered no longer! Their temporary glory vanished like smoke: the glory of the just will never fail: *the righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance.*

Precious recompense! How can we sufficiently esteem it! Is it not a source of the highest consolation, that if we are sincere christians, this recompense is reserved for us? *Great is your reward in heaven.* But woe be unto us, if our recompense be in this world only; if we be numbered amongst them, of whom Jesus Christ said, *verily, they have their reward!* Woe unto us if our names, instead of being *written in heaven,* are recorded only on earth; since, according to the scripture, it is a malediction to be thus recorded: *O Lord, all that forsake thee shall be ashamed, and they that depart from thee, shall be written in the earth.* On the contrary, if we are the most contemned, the most unhappy amongst men, yet blest with the favour of God, let us *rejoice* that

our *names are written in heaven;* recollecting that one of the surest evidences of our title to eternal felicity, is our earthly state of trial and sorrow. When overwhelmed with grief and suffering, let us console ourselves with the Apostle Paul, adopting the sentiment with which he was impressed, when he exclaimed,—*Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.* This momentary and light affliction; this sickness which God has laid upon me; this injustice, this unkindness of which men are guilty; this persecution to which I am subjected; this loss of property occasioned by the unhappiness of the times, and the humiliation to which this loss exposes me; all these temporal afflictions will *work* for me, an *eternal weight of glory.* You require a motive that is impressive, affecting, convincing, to inspire you with christian fortitude: were it possible for me to have presented one which unites all those qualities in a more eminent degree, than that eternal glory, which is to be the recompense of the elect!

This is the motive which has enabled true christians to triumph over the world; which rendered them firm and invincible, in the combats they sustained; which taught them to endure the greatest torments; the fire, the sword, all that is most dreadful, most cruel in death. This motive sup-

ports the righteous, under those severe trials to which the Almighty is perpetually subjecting their faith and perseverance. They endure all things, not only with patience, but with joy, because their hope is full of immortality. Why do we not imitate the saints that are departed? Are we not called upon to sustain the dreadful combats they sustained? Have we, like them, *resisted unto blood, striving against sin?* Why are we thus timid? Why, degenerating from the virtue of our glorious predecessors, who are now our examples, do we discover so much weakness, when we ought, in imitation of them, to obtain a holy victory over ourselves? Because we do not, like them, contemplate that immortality to which they aspired, the hope of which excited, encouraged, and enabled them to surmount every obstacle.

How melancholy is the difference between them and us! May it exist no longer, my brethren. In addition to the motives by which they were actuated, let us profit by the example they have given us. Like them, let us fortify our minds; like them, let us sanctify our hearts, by the hope of eternal felicity.

Ye blessed inhabitants of heaven! Ye were once as we are, and we hope to be as you are: you have felt our miseries; we aspire after your felicity: sinners as we are, we are your brethren; se-

parated as we are, we are still united by the strongest ties, and in the most intimate fellowship. Although inhabitants of the earth, we are *fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of faith:* although poor and distressed in this vale of tears, we are, with you, children of God; *heirs of God, and joint heirs with Jesus Christ.* Let us, christians, this day, hear each one of those saints from the height of glory, thus addressing us: *Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.* In one word, let us live like them; let us combat like them; let us suffer like them; that we may reign with them, and eternally participate with them in glory.

SERMON VI.

ON LOVE TO OUR NEIGHBOUR.

LUKE, x. 33, 34.

But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.

THESE words, my brethren, pourtray the nature of charity, and the sentiments it inspires. By true charity we are tanght to weep over the miseries of a fellow creature; and, not satisfied with the expresssion of useless pity, to exert ourselves in acts of kindness, and to minister to his wants. The compassionate traveller mentioned in our text, sees in his road an unfortunate man, mortally wounded, and lying on the earth. His heart was wrung with pity at the sight, and following the impulse of feeling, he runs towards him, bathes his wounds, undertakes to conduct him to an house, remains with him the whole day, and before his departure furnishes all that is need-

ful for his support. This benevolence undoubtedly merits the highest eulogium, and in itself considered, excites the liveliest admiration: but there is a circumstance, my dear hearers, which renders it still more admirable; a circumstance that is at once a subject of complacency and of indignation. It is a Samaritan who thus interests himself in behalf of a Jew, who had been inhumanly abandoned by one of his own nation, and even by a Levite: it is a Samaritan, separated from the Jews both by dissimilitude of manners, and difference of religion: this demands our admiration: but how can we dwell on the inhumanity of the Jew, and the Levite, who were unconcerned at the calamitous state of a man to whom they were so strictly united by the same law, and the same faith, without feeling the strongest indignation? Let us examine ourselves, my brethren, and declare if we do not find similar cruelty amongst christians, who, notwithstanding we are connected by one faith and one baptism, in an intimate and holy union, are too generally found deficient in love to our fellow christians. Is it not certain that we might frequently expect from pagans and idolaters, more kindness in our afflictions, and more relief in our necessities, than from our brethren?

My object in the present discourse is to shew, in what the love of our neighbour consists; that love which nature inculcates, which the Creator

enjoins, and which the gospel enforces on us, as a more peculiar and indispensible duty.

In order to treat the useful and important subject before us, in the most impressive manner, and to give you a just idea of that love which is the fulfilling of the law, and which Jesus Christ so expressly teaches in our text, I shall confine myself to the exemplification of two truths, from which, if it were in my power to establish them in your minds, I should have reason to expect the most powerful effects in the reformation of your conduct. Listen, then, I entreat you, with serious attention. There are two opposite interests which affect, and ought to regulate the practice of charity; namely, our own interest, and the interest of others. Our own interest, which commonly excites our liveliest emotions, and the interest of others, in which we usually take little concern: our own interest, which we seek with all possible attention, and the interest of others, which we continually neglect, and injure without remorse. The one, I mean our own interest, is the obstacle of charity; the other, that is to say, the interest of our neighbour, is the object of that virtue. In consideration of these opposite interests, I advance two propositions:—First; that we ought, on the most important occasions, unless when the welfare of our souls is concerned, to sacrifice our own interest to the exercise of chris-

tian charity. Secondly; that the exercise ot christian charity requires us to consult and promote the interest of others, even in the most trivial instance. There are two things that interrupt the maintenance of charity amongst men: excessive attention to our own, and neglect of our neighbour's interest. It is my concern on the present occasion, to point out a remedy for both these evils: but how is that to be done? By teaching you to resign your own advantage for the promotion of charity; and, for the same valuable end, to consult the advantage of your neighbour on every occasion. May you profit by our instructions, and never forget these duties!

PART I.

I. That unbounded love for our neighbour enjoined by the law of God, and an absorbing attachment to our own interest, are not merely difficult to reconcile, but according to St. Paul, absolutely opposed. In writing to the Corinthians, that great Apostle has said that true charity *seeketh not her own:* this he points out as one of its most essential qualifications. Hence I conclude, that if we are not in that temper of mind, produced by the aid of divine grace, which I call a renunciation of our own interest, it is impossible that we should love our neighbour with pure and genuine charity. This deduction is evident from

every principle of reason and religion: suffer me, however, to enlarge upon it, that we may derive all the benefit it is calculated to afford. It may be convincingly proved, my brethren, in the first place, from the nature of charity in general: secondly, from the particular qualities of christian charity: thirdly, from the rigorous obligations imposed by charity, according to the different ranks and conditions of men: and lastly, from those vices which in the intercourse of life, perpetually tend to the annihilation of charity. Let us maturely weigh these four arguments, which prove the impossibility of uniting a spirit of charity and a spirit of selfishness.

First. In what does general charity consist? In the union of hearts and inclinations. It is said of the first christians, *the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul;* by which the inspired writer intended to represent their unfeigned charity. This granted, can we doubt that self-interest is the most destructive enemy of charity? In short, how can a man be united in heart with his neighbour, whilst all his affections are centered in his own person; whilst he lives for himself alone, and never feels for any other object; whilst he seeks his own advantage in every thing, regards others only as they are useful to himself, and is ever ready to abandon, I might almost say to deceive and betray them,

when he has the smallest profit in view. In speaking of a *disinterested man,* we describe the most perfect character. Consider, christians, you who possess a knowledge of the world, and who have perhaps experienced too much of the temper of those mercenary souls, whether their charity inspires a sincere affection for any of their fellow-creatures; and whether, in consequence of their indifference to others, they are not viewed with general disesteem. The heart of man is naturally attached to his interest, and where that is placed it will necessarily fix: *where your treasure is, there will your heart be also,* said our Saviour. If, then, I form an interest absolutely selfish and detached from that of my neighbour, I separate my heart from his, and by that separation, destroy the charity I ought to feel; for charity resides in the heart. When interest interferes, there is nothing in common between us; for the heart being absorbed in selfish considerations, when our interests are divided, our hearts will be so likewise, nnd consequently we no longer dwell in that union in which charity consists. I am therefore justified in saying, that there is no object of self-interest the renunciation of which is not essential to charity: and thus might a philosopher reason, even according to worldly views.

You inquire then why I reason from religious considerations. Ah! my dear hearers, I do it to

shame myself and you with the idea, that truths like these, of which even nature has been careful to instruct and convince us, find access to our minds with so much difficulty, although enforced by religion itself; and that divine revelation is insufficient to produce in our minds the effect which ought to be produced by philosophy alone: I do it to overturn a practical error at this time prevalent amongst us, a shadow of charity by which we are deceived, an imaginary love of our neighbour which we regard as a duty. We say, I love that man because God commands me to love him, but I am resolved to have no acquaintance with him. I require nothing of him, I wish him no ill, I take no interest in his affairs; let him study his own advantage, and I will attend to mine: this is the only secret for maintaining charity and living in peace.—The secret for maintaining charity! My brethren, is it possible your blindness can be so great! Alas! it is the secret for stirring up discord, for encouraging aversion, for fomenting hatred, for authorising revenge, and for destroying the very root of charity in the heart. By that false reasoning we reduce the whole of charity to mere negatives; to refraining from the evil we might commit, to restraining the vengeance we might pursue, to the forming of no injurious designs: but were we strictly to observe these rules, which is seldom the case during such an estrangement as I have described, we should still be far from pos-

sessing real charity: charity is something of a positive nature, and it is erroneous in the extreme to imagine it consists in that cold reserve, which inflicts on it the deepest wound. In loving our neighbour we are desirous of his happiness; in desiring his happiness we enter into his interest; but we cannot regard the interest of another whilst we are engrossed with our own. This, I repeat, is what we learn from the law of God, and they who inculcate a different doctrine, seduce and ruin us; for if we mould our consciences according to their instructions, we render them corrupt consciences; and if in addition, we presume, as we too often do, on our false wisdom, flattering ourselves that our opinions are just, and that we are perfectly acquainted with the limits of charity, our wisdom is condemned of God; it is a wisdom which we ourselves should condemn in others when it influenced their conduct towards us; whilst at the same time we justify it in ourselves, and suffer it to direct our conduct towards them. The Apostle reproached certain pretenders to zeal, with similar inconsistency who were great preachers of charity, although very deficient in the practice of that virtue: *Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself.*

What does the Almighty require when he commands us to love our brethren? After all I have

said, christians, nothing is less difficult than to answer this question. He requires us to sacrifice, on many occasions, for the sake of our brethren, that self-interest which claims all our attention, and which violates or destroys our charity. God has promised by his prophet to give us one heart. Why does he promise to give us this union of heart, and at the same time command us to produce it ourselves? The promise and the command are perfectly reconcileable, for that union of hearts which constitutes real charity, although the work of God, is incapable of receiving its accomplishment without our own exertions: it must be begun by grace, but compleated by ourselves; or, more properly speaking, we must co-operate in the work of grace. God promises the assistance of his grace when he says, *I will give them one heart;* and he requires our co-operation by commanding us to unite ourselves in heart. In what does our co-operation consist? I have already told you: it consists in banishing from our heart that attachment to self-interest which excludes every other object; in rendering them susceptible for the welfare of our fellow-creatures, and in cherishing that general good will on which charity depends; for whilst our hearts are selfish, that is to say, whilst they are occupied with that which affects ourselves, with that which in strict justice belongs to us, with that which we imagine

to be our right, they are detached hearts, which have no tendency to unite, and by uniting, to fulfil the law of God. You will say, there is then little charity amongst men: probably, christians, there is still less than we believe; at least, we have reason to apprehend this if we judge from two passages in the writings of Saint Paul, the first of which assures us that *all seek their own*, the other, that charity *seeketh not her own.* We shall then, possibly, be led to conclude, that charity is one of those virtues which are least influential; and I doubt not, that so awful a conclusion would cause you to tremble in the expectation of divine judgments. Deeply impressed with the sentiment, you would exclaim: Almighty God, if my culpable self-love, and excessive attachment to my own interest were attended with no other punishment than the difficulty of forming virtuous friendships; than the deprivation of all the advantages and pleasures of society; than the imputation of meanness, than the detestation of mankind; although these things would be afflicting, they would scarcely be sufficient to detach me from myself: but when I reflect, that by permitting selfishness to gain the ascendant over me, I root from my heart every sentiment of charity; that in ceasing to love my neighbour, I no longer love thee, who art my God; and that in ceasing to love thee, my God, as the fatal and inevitable consequence of my impiety, I must cease to expect thy love towards me, thy

creature. Ah! Lord, what selfish gratifications would I not resign, nay, even shun and abhor, rather than subject myself to this misery.

These remarks concerning charity in general, derive additional force,—Secondly, from the nature of that charity in particular, which the Son of God has taught us, and which is the principal characteristic of the religion we profess: for as every species of love to our neighbour is not charity, so likewise every sort of charity is not christian charity; and if we are destitute of christian charity, though in other respects we may possess angelic virtues, we are nothing in the sight of God. *If I have not charity, I am nothing.* To love each other as men of enlightened minds, with a worldly affection; to love each other as brethren according to the flesh, is not all that is required; we must love each other as disciples of Jesus Christ; otherwise we have not that complete righteousness, exceeding *the righteousness of the Pharisees*, which the gospel declares indispensable for enabling us to enter into the kingdom of heaven. The Redeemer of the world, our great legislator, has enjoined on us a charity far different from that which the law of nature, and the divine law, under the old testament dispensation, had enforced on mankind: hence, he has called it *his* commandment, and a *new* commandment:

This is my commandment, that ye love one another. A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another. He has appointed this love to be the symbol of the christian character, declaring to his disciples that it would be all-sufficient to manifest their religion to the world: *by this shall all men know that ye are my disciples.* It was neither by the power of working miracles, by the knowledge of the scriptures, nor by a life of self-denial, that his followers would be known, because these qualifications might be possessed by others as well as by them; but they alone would practise that perfect charity which he enjoined: and well might he represent it as so distinct in its nature, since he commands them to love one another, with the love that he had shewn to them: *this is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you.* If ever charity was uncommon, singular, and calculated to attract particular observation, it was that which Jesus Christ exercised towards us. And what was its distinguishing characteristic? Ah! christians, can we be ignorant, if we are at all acquainted with the character of Jesus Christ? Disinterestedness was its peculiar attribute: our divine master's love to man led him to sacrifice all his own interests: *he was rich,* and his love induced him to *become poor;* in this he sacrificed his dominion and greatness: he became as nothing from his boundless humility; in this he sacrificed his glory: *he took the form of a servant;*

in this he sacrificed his liberty: he became a *man of sorrows;* in this he sacrificed his happiness: he died the death of a criminal; in this he sacrificed his reputation and his life: he was *stricken, smitten of God;* he was *made a curse for us:* in this he sacrificed the honour he derived from his innocence and holiness.

In all these sacrifices he acted voluntarily, and without them he might have fully evinced his love to man: but that which was free in him, he has made incumbent on us; and that which was entirely meritorious in his charity, is obligatory in ours: for we deceive ourselves, if we profess to love our brethren, without the exercise of self-denial, without the subjugation of our will; if we imagine ourselves actuated by christian charity, whilst we are influenced by the spirit of the world, and its pretended charity and justice towards us; if we are obstinately tenacious of our rights, irritable with respect to our honour, and attentive to the extreme to our own interests. Ah! my dear hearers, to teach us common charity it was not needful that Jesus Christ should come into the world, and serve as our model, nor was his grace required for our assistance; for the principles of such charity were sufficiently established in our minds. It was needless for him to give us a *new* commandment, since in every age men had loved

each other with common affection: in vain might he have enjoined the exercise of this charity as the only mark which could distinguish his disciples, since pagans and unbelievers have ever distinguished themselves in the same manner. How can we reply to the rebuke conveyed in these words; *do not even the publicans the same?* This, my brethren, is our shame and reproach: christians were formerly known by their charity, because christian charity proved victorious over all worldly interest, and now *we* might be known by our self-love, which too frequently constitutes the whole of our charity. In former times, even the enemies of Jesus Christ, surprised at the good will and benevolence of the faithful, exclaimed with admiration, *see how they love one another!* but now, from a strange reverse in our conduct, they might use the same expression as the most bitter, yet just irony:—see how they love one another! See how they cherish under the specious name of charity, the most subtle and unmixed self-love; see how the charity of which they boast, the charity which they extol as the noblest of virtues, is enslaved by their passions; see how it is made to subserve the purposes of cunning avarice; how it is guided by worldly ambition; how it is debased by impure affection. These accusations, my dear hearers, would prove but too just. That which heathens honestly called connections of passion, or of interest, we, by a strange perversion of lan-

guage, denominate charity and religious duty. An idolater, thus attached to another idolater, if he listened to the dictates of conscience, would acknowledge that his love was neither rational, nor virtuous; but we, with a more refined morality, entitle it christian love. Heathens would be unable to reconcile this charity with the imperfection of the law of nature, yet christians find means to reconcile it with the perfection of the law of God!

When I see a man of the world, or a man distinguished from the world, (for, alas! in this respect I find little difference; and it is well if some of the highest professors are not the most subject to the fault I am reproving:) when I see a professor of christianity exercising only a selfish charity; a charity which lavishes attentions on those alone to whom he is obliged, or whose good will he deems useful or necessary to his interest, whilst to others it is indifferent, cold, and inactive, unwilling in any instance to yield, highly susceptible of injury, intolerant, capricious, mistrustful; a charity which allows him to be easily irritated, and when offended, proud, disdainful, determined not to submit, resolved to be entreated to reconciliation; ready to forget kindness, but eternally impressed with the memory of an offence; when I behold a christian encouraging such a sentiment as a laudable motive of conduct, ari-

sing from knowledge of the world, and energy of mind; and to compleat his delusion, flattering himself that he possesses, not only that disposition which is called charity, but that higher species of charity which St. Paul describes as *the love of Jesus Christ*, and the love which ought to dwell in all his disciples; ah! my brother, I might exclaim, how awful is your condition, and how distant are the paths in which you are wandering, from the ways of your Saviour! Had his charity been like yours, to what a situation would you have been reduced? Had he loved only those who were amiable, and those who were capable of adding to his glory, what would have been your portion? In what could you be useful to him? What qualifications did you possess that were worthy of him? What did he behold in you that could attract his love? Had he waited till you sought his grace, how would your salvation have been procured? Did not he, with divine condescension, first offer you his love? Is it then just that you should be more tenacious of your interest than he was of his? Is it not iniquitous in you to treat your brethren with greater severity than he has shewn to you; to require more deference than he has required; to be disgusted with a variety of imperfections in your neighbour, which he has endured in you? Is it not strange that you cannot tolerate what he has tolerated; that you cannot love those whom he has loved, as if

you had a right to demand more than he demanded, and to restrain your charity to others, when his has overflowed to you? The love of our Redeemer, christians, ought to be the rule of our love; and his religion teaches us, that the love of our neighbour will be measured, at the tribunal of heaven, by the love of Jesus Christ to the human race. It will not be sufficient that you have possessed ordinary charity; your charity must have resembled that of Jesus Christ: and to deprive you of all excuse, you will be reminded of his commandment: *this is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you.* It is not mere advice that I gave you; advice which you were at liberty to follow or to reject; not a work of supererogation which I proposed, but a law which I laid down, and for the observance of which you are called upon to render an account: *this is my commandment.* Ah! my dear hearers, what shall we answer to such an address?

For after all, true charity requires that we should absolutely renounce all our worldly interests. Attend therefore to my *third* argument, derived from the obligations imposed by charity on the different ranks and conditions of men. Yes, christians, our own interest, to what object soever it may relate, except the salvation of our souls, must on numberless occasions be sacrificed to the love of our neighbour: such is the precept of christian

charity; such the morality of our religion, and which no considerations can alter.

It appears scarcely credible, that a man should renounce his life for the sake of others; yet charity strictly enjoins this sacrifice. St. John informs us that the love of our Saviour was evident, *because he laid down his life for us*; and on that account, he adds, *we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.* These words, dictated by the holy spirit, are clear and unequivocal: it is not said that we *may,* but that *we ought to lay down our lives;* and surely the obligation must, on numberless occasions, be indispensible. Thus St. Cyprian represented to the inhabitants of Carthage, that the contagion that had afflicted their city, was but a general trial which the Almighty had made of their charity: that having resolved to teach them the duty of christians to the sick, the duty of children to their parents, of parents to their children, of masters to their servants, he had laid them under the necessity of exposing themselves for each other, and of sacrificing their own lives, to save the lives of their fellow creatures. We may apply what was said on that occasion to various persons; we may repeat it, for instance, to shew the criminality of a pastor who abandons his flock; of a magistrate, who from a love of ease, neglects his duty to the public: for if I am required to sacrifice my life for others, why should I not think myself obli-

ged to give up my repose, or impair my health, when the case demands extraordinary exertion? *We ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.*

Charity requires us to renounce our honour and reputation: that worldly honour which, vain and chimercial as it is, we nevertheless estimate more highly than life itself. Worldly honour hurries men to the greatest excesses; they not unfrequently proceed to violence and murder. Human laws may in some measure retrain such violence, yet the passion remains unextinguished in our bosoms; resisting the authority of God, and inspiring us with hatred, anger, and revenge: if then we do not renounce this honour, it will be impossible for us to avoid those enormities, expressly forbidden by the law of charity.

We must sacrifice our possessions, and our rights; a duty most clearly and emphatically pointed out in the gospel: for how could the Son of God express himself more decisively, than by what he has said in the sixth chapter of St. Luke: *of him that taketh away thy goods, ask them not again?* But is it not allowable, without taking the execution of justice into my own hands, to use lawful means for recovering them? Permit me, christians, to enlarge on this subject, which in a moral view, is perhaps of equal importance to any that has been considered in this pulpit. Is it not

allowable to use the means of justice, for obtaining my rights? Yes, my dear hearers, when that justice is compatible with charity; but as soon as charity is wounded, it is no longer justice, but the greatest injustice; since it destroys a real and solid good, by procuring you a shadow of advantage. In numberless instances this pretended justice, and christian charity, are at variance; at variance on account of your brother, and at variance on your own account. They are incompatible on your brother's account, when you know that he is perfectly sincere in assuring you of his inability to satisfy your demands, and that the means you employ to obtain justice, will serve only to oppress him, to ruin him with useless expence, and to sink him in despair; for in this case justice becomes cruelty, and the renouncing of your right is enjoined by the precepts of mercy. They are at variance on your own account, when you are aware, from the knowledge you have of your temper and disposition, that you cannot reasonably hope to prosecute your claim, without suffering animosity and passion, not only to debase your motives, but to take possession of your heart. You ought then to renounce your right. Why? Because the charity you otherwise lose, should be much more dear to you, since it is much more essential to your true interest, than the possession of any right. This my brethren, is the meaning of that maxim of our Saviour, which to the man of worldly prudence,

appears so astonishing and censurable, but which is, in fact, truly just and reasonable: *him that taketh away thy cloak, forbid not to take thy coat also.* It does not follow that in every case, our Saviour has forbidden us to have recourse to law. To assert this, and pronounce a general censure on the use of all the means of justice, would be ignorance and temerity; as, on the other hand, the general and undistinguishing allowance of them would, more especially in a minister of the gospel, be prevarication. But it follows from the precepts of christianity, that a law-suit is one of those things, which, though indifferent in their nature are in most cases attended with pernicious circumstances. In short, the man who, on examining his own heart, is obliged to acknowledge before God, that he cannot enter into a law-suit, without indulging sinful passions, that is to say, without deceiving, or slandering, or hating his brother, ought from this consideration alone, to avoid such procedure as criminal; to reflect that however manifest may be his right, in the opinion of men, he is guilty of injustice in the sight of God, and seriously to consider those words of St. Paul, as addressed to himself: *Why do ye not rather take wrong? Why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?* We every where find persons of this description, I mean professors of christianity, who are so irritable and selfish, as to be incapable, whilst engaged in litigation, of pre-

serving the moderation of justice, much more the gentleness of charity: and for this reason I assert, that the generality of law-suits, though just in their origin, are criminal in their progress, because to the generality of men, they are occasions of violating charity. This is the just and pure morality of the gospel; it is free from extravagance, for it was taught us by Jesus Christ and his Apostles. If you object, that it is calculated to disquiet the conscience: I answer; instead of disquieting, it will, if well understood, and consistently practised, calm and strengthen the conscience; because it will render men in an affair of this nature circumspect; it will teach them to conduct it with propriety; because it will induce them, before they engage in it, to reflect seriously, and to use all the generous influence of charity. Were our characters such as St. Paul endeavoured to form, we should not wait for an express command; we should voluntarily sacrifice our claims to the promotion of charity.

But what I claim, you will reply, is in strict justice, my due. Be it so, my brother; and what inference do you draw? Is it a maxim, I will not say of christianity, but of mere humanity, to exact all that is your due? Is not the exercise of severe justice, frequently an act of injustice? If such a plan were constantly pursued, what charity, what union, what fellowship, would there be

amongst men? You ought therefore, to adopt an opposite mode of reasoning, and to say; although in strict justice, this is my due, I resign it: I may possibly be under a mistake; every one imagines there is equity in his own cause: although justice may be on my side, I might incur the danger of pursuing it with too much vehemence, and of making a good cause the occasion of sin: although I may foresee no danger to myself, I am not aware of the effect that may be produced on my neighbour, who, not convinced of my right, or offended because I rigorously demand it, may resent my severity with irreconcilable hatred. Thus ought you to argue; and for want of this renunciation of self-interest, what vicious passions arise in the mind, perpetually tending to the destruction of charity! From this I derive my *fourth* and last argument.

Remove self-interest, or rather, an excessive attachment to self-interest, and charity will be cultivated. Discord will no longer prevail; we shall no longer witness contention between individuals, division in families, factions in the state, nor schisms in the church; for all these enormities proceed originally from selfishness. What occasions men to view each other with detestation? Self-interest. Why do they strive (frequently with success) to injure and destroy each other? Because they are eager for

their own interest. If, then, I am zealous for the preservation of charity, I ought to endeavour earnestly to divest myself of undue regard to my own interest. There are no wars, no jealousies, no malignant passions to disturb the peace of the heavenly world. Whence, my brethren, arises the constant and indissoluble union of its inhabitants? Does it arise from their enjoying the presence of the Almighty, and ardently loving him; from their being in his presence, and rejoicing in the light of his glory? Their charity is doubtless promoted by these advantages; but the more immediate cause is, amongst the blessed no selfish distinctions of personal interest are known: they have all but one interest, the possession of God; and as the object after which they aspire, though undivided, is attainable by all, they ever remain united in the bosom of divine love. To us, christians, who are far from the perfection of that happy state, no expressions or feelings are so familiar as those of individual interest: but let us reflect, that the gospel will prove our condemnation, if we are not watchful over our own hearts, and careful to preserve the bonds of charity entire. Were we like the inhabitants of heaven, exempt from all self-interest, we should find no difficulty in obeying the divine command of *dwelling in charity:* but since we are inhabitants of the earth, the subjects of divided interests, yet indispensably obliged to the performance of all the duties of charity, we ought to

exercise perpetual fear and caution, lest selfish passion should take possession of our hearts, to the exclusion of this charity. But this is not all, my brethren: that charity which commands us to to renounce our own interest, enjoins us at the same time, to respect and promote the interest of our neighbour. This is our second part.

PART II.

II. Is it not a paradox to say that we are obliged to consult the interest of others, whilst at the same time our God commands us to sacrifice our own interest? No, christians; it is a certain, incontestable truth, a principle of morality, universally acknowledged; which may be proved even without the precepts of christianity; which the world itself allows: for although this is one of the injunctions it most boldly violates in practice, yet in speculation it is ever ready to own its necessity and excellence.

A man to whom the interest of another is intrusted, feels himself obliged, from motives of honour, to promote it more diligently than his own; and were he reproached with having betrayed it, he would be more disgraced than by an imputation of negligence with respect to his own interest. If the world then, in the corrupt state to which it is reduced by self love, still retains such equi-

table sentiments, what views ought we to entertain who profess to be christians; and for what sacrifices ought we not to prepare ourselves, that we may arrive at that standard of perfection which the gospel exhibits!

It was just that God should establish this order of things amongst men; that he should command us zealously to advance the welfare of our neighbour, whilst he requires the most sincere renunciation of our own interest; for he knew that after all our endeavours to attain a disinterested temper, our own advantage would still claim too much of our industry and zeal; and that however warmly we might engage in the interest of others, we should scarcely ever fulfil the claims of strict justice. For this reason God has not in all the precepts of charity, given in the decalogue, enjoined the love of ourselves, although self love well regulated, is a principle implanted in our minds by our creator. *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind: this is the first and great commandment: and the second is like unto it; thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.* Here the love of ourselves is evidently permitted, but it does not form part of the command: it is not said, thou shalt also love thyself with that just and rational love, which nature inspires: it was needless for God to enforce this duty, by an express law: he knew that man

would not forget his own interest, and therefore, instead of enjoining self love, he has given us, in the gospel, that great command, to deny ourselves.

We see then, christians, the truth of our second proposition, that on every occasion, we are bound to consult the interest of others, and that for the following reasons. *First:* every object of my neighbour's interest claims the exercise of christian love, therefore his interest ought to be dear and sacred to me. *Secondly:* because that instance in which the interest of others appears with respect to charity, unimportant in itself, is generally important in its consequences; and by its consequences we ought to estmate it, in order to judge rightly of the obligation it imposes. *Thirdly:* because the smallest neglect of others, may, from the weakness of mankind, be injurious to charity: therefore I am inexcusable if I fail, in the intercourse of life, to use all the circumspection required by christian prudence. Fully to discuss these three arguments would demand as many separate discourses; but to avoid wearying your patience, I shall say only a few words on each.

Yes, my dear hearers, every object of our neighbour's interest claims the exercise of christian love; consequently it ought, according to the law of God, to excite our greatest attention. Were

we to regard this interest from motives of friendship, how carefully, how religiously should we consult it! How should we boast of the fidelity which shewed the value we attached to the interest of our friend! To what an extent should we carry our affection and zeal! Such is our criminal inconsistency, that we make a sort of religion of our friendship, whilst we profane that most sacred of virtues, charity. Friendship renders us circumspect, moderate, obliging, generous, faithful; but how seldom does our charity produce these effects! Yet we learn from christianity, that if our charity is not stronger and more efficacious than our friendship, we are not only unprofitable members of society, but objects of the divine displeasure. I am not therefore actuated merely by the interest of the man I esteem, when I fear to wound his honour, or to attack his rights; I have a still nobler object before my eyes; this honour, these rights, appear invested with the character of christian love, and this is sufficient to deter me from attempting to injure them. This character of charity attaching to all the concerns in which my neighbour is interested, appears to me a safeguard placed on them by God; a consideration, which if I am influenced by the spirit of the gospel, would prove more powerful in restraining me, than any other arising from the respect I owe to a fellow creature. In attention to these objects true charity consists; for charity, I repeat,

is not an indolent and abstracted virtue, it is unceasingly occupied, and the object of its exertions is the welfare of others. Our self-love forms designs inimical to that welfare; charity opposes their accomplishment: the welfare of others is attacked by our ambition or envy; charity is its protector: that welfare is wounded by our imprudence; charity provides a remedy: that welfare is injured by our injustice; charity repairs the wrong. These ought to be the effects of our love; for to love our neighbour without evincing any deference, or condescention, or prudence; without shewing any tenderness to his feelings, or fear of injuring or displeasing him, proves only that charity, not acknowledged by St. Paul, and which is but a chimera, when compared with that christian love the great apostle so beautifully describes. Yet this chimera is the charity, cultivated by the ill-judging world; for their idea of charity neither excludes self-love, in its most vicious form, nor is incompatible with the neglect of our neighbour's welfare. It is a charity which, instead of being occupied by the interest of others, considers it an object of indifference or amusement. In the present day, we have even discovered the secret of loving our christian brethren, and at the same time, of giving them all the pain we should inflict on our avowed enemies; and we injure them more effectually, by loudly protesting that we are not actua-

ted by hatred. We ridicule, offend, and mortify them; we censure their actions, counteract their designs, impede their success; and at the same time we profess, and even flatter ourselves, that we love them. Can there be a more gross, a more awful delusion!

But the interest of others, you will say, is in many instances too unimportant to impose so strict an obligation. I reply by my *second* argument; that with respect to christian charity, nothing ought to be regarded as unimportant. In consequence of our indifference towards the welfare of others, we seldom judge equitably; and as self-love is ever ready to aggravate, in our eyes, the slightest offence committed against ourselves, it is equally prompt and ingenious, in palliating the most grievous offences, committed by us against our neighbour. This truth is evident from experience: it is what the wise man refers to, when he says; *divers weights, and divers measures, both of them are alike abomination to the Lord.* We have one weight and measure, for our own injuries, by which we exaggerate, and amplify; another for the injuries of our neighbour, by which we palliate, and justify; but it is not only from this general consideration, but from another more particular, the justness of which we must acknowledge, that whatever is trivial in itself is commonly, in relation to charity, important in its consequences;

therefore the neglect of it ought not to be estimated by the evil produced in the first instance, but by the innumerable evils, which may afterwards arise.

For example: that refined and brilliant wit, which was probably admired by all who were not implicated in its censure, if repeated to the person to whom it applied, what emotions of indignation would it not excite? Is not that aversion towards you which your neighbour may evince, produced by your obstinate, capricious, and absurd conduct; by the hasty and insulting language, which has escaped you; by your unwillingness, when it was your duty, to comply with his wishes; and by your unkind and harsh refusal of a favour he might have some reason to expect? Had you respected the claims of charity; had your conduct towards this man shewn all the consideration and prudence you require in others, you would be still *dwelling together in unity*, and we should not witness your dissentions, your aversion, and your revenge. This flame might arise from a single spark, but as you did not strive to extinguish that spark on its first appearance, you are responsible for the conflagration it has produced. In short, we every day see the most ungovernable strife, the most violent enmity, the most scandalous disorders, originating in some slight injury, the effect of mere indiscretion. Can we doubt, my

brethren, that we are responsible for such effects of our conduct; that it is our duty to foresee, and prevent them? Does not our knowledge of the world convince us of this truth; and is it not frequently proved by our own actions? When we are desirous of obtaining the favour of the great, do we disregard even the most trivial circumstances? Persuaded that our fortune depends on their will, do we not fear to give them uneasiness; do we not consult their inclinations, and study to please them? Have we then reason to complain, when we are required to do that for the sake of charity, which we think it right to perform for our temporal advantage?

We imagine ourselves fully justified by saying; if we can declare, I have not hurt the reputation of those persons who complain of my ill-usage; I have done them no essential injury: but this is one of the most frivolous apologies ever used by the world to conceal its malignity; for charity may be destroyed by other means than essential injuries, or offences against honour and reputation. Some men would not be less offended at raillery which implied a censure for ignorance, than at a serious charge of dishonesty. Every thing that unjustly irritates our fellow creatures, and embitters their minds, is destructive of charity, and when I give them pain on any subject, however insignificant, which they do not deserve, I become ac-

countable in the sight of God for the consequences of my indiscretion.

Lastly: as the charity of our fellow creatures is in its nature extremely susceptible, it requires on our part the most delicate regard; and much of the respect it claims from us is on account of its weakness, which demands our condescension. We must not consider this virtue abstractedly, nor as it might exist in creatures of a different species from those it has pleased the Almighty to create; nor even as we may wish to find it in our neighbour; but we must consider it as it now exists. We know that charity, is an energetic and powerful virtue, but we do not see its perfection in the persons with whom we associate; on the contrary, in them we must expect to find it feeble, susceptible of every impression, easily offended, and endangered by the slightest injury; on this account it is incumbent on us to study ourselves, to watch over our own hearts, and to act with the greatest caution. But the scrupulous nature of charity you will say is the result of human imperfection.—True, my brother, and what inferences do you draw? Men are born imperfect; you are then allowed to treat them as if they were perfect? They are susceptible in the extreme to all that affects their own character; you may then irritate and afflict them with impunity! Charity in their hearts is weak; you are not then required

to condescend to its weakness!—Did St. Paul thus reason? Were these the maxims he taught the faithful, when enjoining them to consider the weakness of their brethren, and carefully to avoid giving them offence, even in things that were innocent, lest *through their knowledge the weak brother should perish for whom Christ died!* No, my dear hearers, if you judge according to the laws of christianity, you will rather say, it is my duty as a christian to yield to the weak, and lend them my support: and since my christian brother may be so deeply offended by an injurious word, or an incautious raillery, I should avoid that raillery, that word, as a sin. Men have ever been weak and imperfect: the recollection of this truth is the foundation of charity: were I to refrain from loving men till they were no longer subject to weakness and imperfection, I should for ever renounce this virtue. My God commands me to love them, frail and imperfect as they are; but I cannot love them without regarding even their minutest interests, without yielding in some measure to their weaknesses, without endeavouring to avoid giving them offence, and without helping their infirmities.

These, my brethren, are the sentiments I would impress on your minds, and I conclude with the admirable and impressive exhortation of St. Peter: *Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings,*

as new born babes desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby. Divest yourselves of that malignity, and animosity which poison the human heart: cease to deceive, and no longer conceal, under a serene countenance, the most violent resentment and the fiercest passions: root from your hearts that secret envy and jealousy which renders the success of others a source of misery to you: repeat not those calumnies which exclude charity from your minds. If unhappily, you are estranged from your brother, solicit the return of his love, and manifest an increased affection for him: let not your reconciliation be retarded by useless form, but obey the Apostle's injunction: *in honour preferring one another.* Imitate the amiable simplicity of children, which on various occasions is more valuable to a christian than all the wisdom of the world. Remember it is impossible to belong to Jesus Christ, without possesing the temper of Jesus Christ; without possessing unfeigned charity.

Descend Holy Spirit! descend into our hearts, and restore that inestimable virtue. By causing it again to flourish in society, thou wilt *renew the face of the earth.* Work this miracle, O! Lord, for thy whole church, but especially for all those who compose this auditory, that they may be now united by genuine charity, and eternally united in the same felicity!

SERMON VII.

ON THE FORGIVENESS OF INJURIES.

MATTHEW, xviii. 32, 33, 34.

Then his Lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee? And his Lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors.

NEVER was rebuke more pointed; never was punishment more just! By the light of nature, and by the moral sense, every man must feel the force of the one, and approve the justice of the other: for how could that servant, defend his stern and merciless resolution, to exact immediate payment of the *hundred pence*, when his master, moved with compassion for his misery, had just forgiven him a debt of *ten thousand talents?* If the master, incensed at such conduct, instantly inflicts punishment; if he treats this wretched worldling as he himself had treated his debtor, and casts him into the same gloomy prison in which he had

confined his fellow-servant, the motive and equity of the proceeding is at once apparent. This, my dear hearers, is the parable presented in our text, and whilst we consider the figurative meaning alone, we find nothing astonishing, nothing inconsistent with the laws of strict justice: but let us leave the parable, and proceed to the application. We find, in the chapter before us, the explanation given by Jesus Christ himself; and it is well calculated to excite our serious attention. *So likewise, shall my heavenly father do also unto you.* To whom does the Saviour utter this awful threatning? To you, christians, and to me, if we extend not to our neighbour, that charity which the God of mercy has so often shewn, and is continually shewing to ourselves; if, when offended, we abandon ourselves to emotions of anger, and projects of revenge; if we are unwilling to pardon; if we do not when it is our duty, forgive all the debt, or if we do not forgive with sincerity. *So likewise, shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts, forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.* Hence, my brethren, you see the importance of the duty to which I have to exhort you,—*the forgivness of injuries:*—A subject of infinite moment. Assist me, O! Lord, in speaking, for never was there an occasion on which thy grace was more indispensible.

If I were addressing myself to pagans, and discoursing as a philosopher, I might find, even in the principles of common prudence, that which would serve to repress the impetuosity of revenge, and to condemn a passion which is equally blind and ungovernable : but we must acknowledge, my dear hearers, that with all the motives of human wisdom, we might say much, yet produce little effect, and that the most plausible reasoning would tend, not to convince your understandings, nor affect your hearts, but merely to satisfy your curiosity. It is needful then to proceed on higher grounds, and to have recourse to the doctrines of religion. I must address you, not as a philosopher, but as a minister of Jesus Christ : to subdue your will, the authority of God himself, must be employed ; and to engage your affections, an eternal interest proposed. Attend to my design, which I will explain in a few words. In order to ensure your obedience to this most important command, I shall endeavour to establish two propositions, forming the two parts of my discourse. *First :* God has a right to enjoin the duty of forgiveness of injuries. *Secondly :* By refusing to forgive the injuries of others, we render it just that the Almighty should withhold forgiveness from ourselves.

PART I.

I. The forgiveness of injuries, I allow, is most difficult: there is no feeling in the heart of man, to which it is not repugnant: it is the most sublime, the most heroic, the most perfect attainment of christianity. Judging, according to the sentiments of nature, to pardon sincerely, and without reserve, is the most arduous proof of charity, and one of the greatest efforts of religion: but after all, christians, I maintain, that God has a right to require, and that he actually does require of us, this effort: he requires it as our *Governor*, as our *Father*, as our *Example*, as our *Judge*. As our *Governor*, by the law which he has given; as our *Father*, by the numberless blessings which he bestows; as our *Example*, by those actions he proposes for our imitation; as our *Judge*, by the forgiveness which he has promised.

The pardon of injuries, and the love of our enemies, is a precept, my dear hearers, founded on the laws of of God, a precept, coeval with revealed religion. In the law of nature, in the written law, in the law of christianity, we find the love of our enemies, an indispensible obligation. It was not the Almighty who said to the Jews, *thou shall love thy neighbour and hate thine enemy*, but those who ill interpreted his law. This

was not a tradition of Moses, but a tradition of the Pharisees, who, corrupting the law of Moses, believed that the injunction to love their neighbour, authorised them to hate their enemy. Jesus Christ did not proclaim a new law when, exerting his legislative authority, he commanded the forgiveness and love of our enemies; he only republished a law which was in a manner blotted out of the memory of mankind; he only explained a law which had been obscured by their ignorance and errors; he only enforced a law which was seemingly abolished by an almost universal corruption of morals. *For if ye love them which love you*, said our Saviour, *what reward have ye? Do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others?* All your charity is not worthy the favour of God; nor such as God requires;—it is not a supernatural virtue, but merely an human affection: therefore, infers the Son of God, you are commanded to love even your enemies; to forgive your enemies their offences committed against you; to preserve, and to seek peace with your enemies. *But I say unto you, love your enemies.*

I assert, christians, that God has an incontestible right to lay this command upon us, because he is our *Governor;* and consequently that we are indispensibly obliged to obey the command, that we may acknowledge our dependence in this, as

well as in every other instance; and that we may render just homage to his sovereign power. This precept is indeed founded on the most solid and evident reasons; but when the authority of God, with the absolute submission which he claims as our sovereign is in question, it is an affront to demand the reason of his injunctions. He utters his command; *I say unto you:* that it is sufficient. What are we, that we should enter into a discussion with our God? Is it our province to dispute his supreme and adorable will? *O man, who art thou that repliest against God?*

What is then the most concise and determinate argument to shew the fallacy of all your excuses, to overturn the reasoning by which you endeavour to conceal the criminality of revenge? It is this:—God enjoins you to forgive, to forgive from your heart; it is his will that you should not rest satisfied with preserving a pacific appearance, and avoiding hostility, but that you should banish from your heart all wilful animosity and resentment. This is the command of the Almighty; *I say unto you:* and to this command you can make no reasonable objection. The sacrifice of my will, you say, must be great: but when that sacrifice is needful you are not to inquire whether it is great or small, since there is nothing, how precious soever it may be, which you ought not to sacrifice to your God.—But the effort is above the power of

nature.—My brethren, you are not exhorted to make this effort by the power of nature alone, but by the power of divine grace, which is always granted to those who sincerely ask it; which will never fail, and which is all-sufficient for your support. But I feel an invincible repugnance; I am unable to do such violence to my feelings. You are able to do whatever God ordains, for he commands nothing which is imposible. But what will be the opinion of the world? It will consider you a christian, a consistent christian; it will observe, and be edified by your submission to the will of God; or if it should otherwise judge and speak of you, you will despise its opinion, and its censures, remembering that it is the order of God, and not the opinion of the world to which you are to be conformed.—But I shall be thought feeble-minded, and my honour will suffer.—Your highest honour is to renounce, for God, all worldly honour; and the greatest heroism, is at once to triumph over yourself and the world. But my enemy will avail himself of my indulgence, and become more bold in his attacks. He will possibly be softened by your christian christian temper; or if, on the contrary, his conduct should become more injurious, still you will advance in the favour of God, whose approbation alone is of importance. Ah! christians, how fruitful is our self-love in inventing subtilties by which it would justify itself, and evade with impunity the law of God! We should in vain

attempt to disclose all its artifices; the subject is inexhaustible: but were it a thousand times more subtle and ingenious, it must nevertheless yield to the sovereign authority of our supreme governor who prohibits all hatred, and who has declared so unequivocally, *I say unto you, love your enemies.*

It is not however by mere submission and constrained obedience, that the Almighty requires us to keep his command; he would influence us to pardon the offences of our fellow creature by motives of gratitude, and our God interests himself in his behalf as our benefactor and father, rather than as our lawgiver and sovereign. Had he enjoined us to love and forgive our enemies for their own sake, the command might appear hard and rigorous; for when we consider the character of an enemy abstractedly, we find nothing that is not offensive, that does not tend to irritate our minds and fill them with rancour. How then does our God act? He presents himself before you, my dear hearers, and withdrawing your eyes from a painful object, commands you to fix them on himself. He does not require us to pardon for the sake of the offender, but for his own sake. He does not say to you, forgive your enemies because they deserve your forgiveness; but he says, forgive them because I deserve your compliance with my

will. It is not his precept, that you should consider what is owing to your enemies, but rather, what is due to himself, and what he has done for them. Thus the children of Jacob moved the heart of Joseph their brother, whom they had basely sold: thus they obtained his pardon of a crime almost unpardonable, and which was prompted by their envy. *Thy father did command before he died, saying; so shall ye say unto Joseph, forgive, I pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren, and their sin; for they did unto thee evil.* At the remembrance of Jacob, of that beloved, that tender, that affectionate father, Joseph felt his bowels yearn; his tears flowed; and instead of reproaching his sanguinary brethren with their inhumanity, or uttering an angry word, he endeavoured to console them: *fear not:* he became their apologist: *ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good:* he promised them and their families his protection and support: *I will nourish you, and your little ones.*

Christians! It is not not in the name of an earthly father, nor of a man like yourselves; it is in the name of your heavenly Father, in the name of your Creator and Redeemer, that I address you. How often, when meditating on his goodness, have you, like David, with renewed zeal and piety exclaimed: *What shall I render unto the Lord, for all his benefits towards me?* How many times

have you ardently wished for an opportunity of giving infallible marks of your love! That opportunity is afforded you: as soon as you pardon offences for the sake of your God, you may rest assured that you love God. To a mind that retains any susceptibility of religious impressions, I can imagine nothing more influential, nor more consolatory than this argument. The greatest consolation I can possess on earth is to believe, with all the certainty attainable in this life, that I love God; that I love him with a genuine, not a seeming and doubtful love; for as far as I am conscious of loving God, so far am I convinced that I possess his love, and am the object of his grace. Of all the evidences which I can desire on this subject, no one is less equivocal than the forgiveness of an enemy, because nothing but the love of God, the most entire love, can induce me to grant that forgiveness. Nature will not furnish me with motives to a virtue which it directly opposes, nor will the world produce in me that disposition which is repugnant to all its maxims.

How animating, my dear hearers, how delightful is that consciousness which enables us to say; I know that I love my God, that I love him with sincerity: I perform for the sake of my God, that which I can do for his sake alone; therefore I am

convinced that my motive is pure. With what joy is such a reflection accompanied!

But here lies the evil: without considering God in our fellow-creature, we regard our fellow-creature alone: hence those tedious and vain declamations on the unworthy treatment we have received, on the audacity of one, on the perfidy of another, on numberless circumstances which we frequently misrepresent, exaggerate, and pourtray in the darkest colours. Allowing, however, my brethren, that your opinions and representations are just, can you not comprehend that this will by no means weaken our argument? When we exhort you to forgive, we do not profess to exculpate the transgressor; for if he were innocent you would have no occasion to pardon him. What do we then require? That you should rise above the creature; that you should give to God what you would refuse to man; that you should know that your God will consider himself honoured and glorified by the forgiveness of your enemy. The moment this important, this fundamental truth is impressed on your minds, what efforts will appear too arduous, what will have power to impede your progress?

Let us go further. Do we require a glorious example to influence and regulate our hearts? The Almighty himself is our example, and we are in-

structed by his gentleness, and his mercies towards us. In vain we remonstrate; in vain we talk of our rights; there never was, nor never will be a reply which can weaken the argument addressed to us by our God in the parabolic language of the text: *I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee?* I love my enemies. and forgive their sins; my love has been constant to you, and how many times have you received my forgiveness? Ought you not then to imitate my mercy, and to pardon your enemies as I pardon mine? This reasoning cannot be invalidated: we must yield to its irrisistible authority. Examine it, my dear hearers, in every point of view: consider the transgression of each offender, the person who is offended, the person by whom the offence is committed, the power and the manner of taking revenge, the advantage to be derived from pardoning, the end that may be proposed in either plan of conduct. Reflect seriously on all these things, and in every particular you will see that if you do not imitate the example of your God, that example alone, will render you highly criminal, and will be sufficient for your condemnation. You will discover that your revenge is blind, weak, cowardly, and unjust; that it renders you ungrateful towards God, and forgetful of your own character.

To enter still more minutely into the subject, we are sometimes so enraged at an injury, that we angrily appeal to God himself: but how many offences have been committed, and are committed daily against him? We cannot bear to be attacked or insulted by any individual; yet we see millions of men, or rather, the whole human race, who are rebelling against God: we can with difficulty endure a series of unkind actions from one man; but the Almighty informs us, that ever since the creation, the world has not, for one moment, ceased to insult *him*. To us it is grievous to find an enemy in this family, in that society; yet our God has enemies throughout the whole earth. To what is our sensibility so alive? What is it that irritates our feelings to so great a degree? Frequently a word misunderstood, a sally of wit, a dispute in conversation, a momentary warmth, a slight mark of contempt, an air of indifference and coldness, a rejection of some frivolous claim, a point of honour! These, you know, are the things which give rise to the most deadly hatred amongst men; and even amongst those who are anxious to be thought men of strong and liberal minds. When we consider the dissentions of mankind in their origin, how ridiculous do they appear! In what respect are the offences we receive comparable with the outrages committed against our God; with the impiety, the sacrilege, the blasphemies, the profanation of his altar, of

his name, and of his most sacred truths; with the perpetual and open violation of his law? Let us call to mind, who is that God! our Sovereign, the Creator of the universe! and who are we, his feeble creatures, formed by his hand and created out of nothing? If we, who are such abject beings, urge our complaints with so much arrogance, on receiving the slightest injury, will not the example of our Creator put us to shame, and has he not a right to say: *I forgave thee all that debt: shouldst not thou also have had compassion?* I, who am exposed to the insolence of sinners, and the excesses of their passions, though great beyond compare, and worthy of all homage, yet lay aside, as it were, the superiority of my nature, and forgetting the innumerable multitude, the greatness, the enormity of their crimes, I stretch out the arms of my mercy to bring them back, I receive them again into my bosom, I prevent them with my grace, and bestow upon them my choicest gifts. Thus I act, who am God over all: but you, relentless in your enmity, listen to the dictates of passion and revenge; you, who are men, treat with inexorable severity your fellow-men. Banishing the remembrance of your common origin, which renders you all equal in my sight, you make use of artificial distinctions to exaggerate all the offences committed against you, and to represent them as unpardonable. Fearing to relax in your claims, and to give up any portion of those rights

which are rather imaginary than real, you spend whole years, perhaps your whole life, in scandalous dissentions, rather than make any advances towards a reconciliation; and for a single offence, for a moment of neglect, you demand endless reparation: or, considering it highly meritorious to avoid an open rupture, you remain in a state of indifference which proves too clearly the alienation of your hearts. Are these the laws of the charity I have taught you, and of which I have given you an example?

Woe unto us, my brethren, if we imitate not our divine exemplar! The ambition of resembling God was the original sin of man; but in the forgiveness of injuries, God not only permits, but exhorts and commands us to be perfect as he is perfect: the first sin of man consisted in the ambition of resembling the Supreme Being in his pre-eminence; man wished to be like God in his greatness, in his knowledge, in his independence: this was criminal presumption and insufferable pride: but the perfection of man depends on his resembling the Almighty by the imitation of his holiness and goodness; on his being benevolent like God, merciful like God, and patient like God. *Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.*

I observe still further: you ought, my dear hearers, to be the more powerfully influenced by the example of your God, from the consideration that it includes his conduct towards each of you in particular. I have represented in general terms only, the outrages which are committed by men against their Creator, and the sins which he so willingly and generously pardons; but were I separately to address every individual in this audience, and place before his eyes all the offences which, in the course of his life, have called for the mercy of his God; offences which he trusts the Almighty has pardoned: were I to represent to the sensualist the extreme culpability of that vicious habit, which has led him to indulge in the gratification of his most inordinate desires; which has, on numberless occasions, compelled him to neglect the admonitions of conscience; to disregard the voice of God; to reject that grace which enlightened and urged him; to trample on that divine law which disquieted and restrained him; to ridicule the most sacred truths which condemned his conduct, and troubled his mind; and to sacrifice the honour of God, to the perishable object which fascinates and engrosses him: were I, reviewing every description of men, to address in a similar manner the impious, the ambitious, the covetous person, (for there is too much reason to fear that all these characters are to be found in this assembly:) I repeat, were I to recall to your

memory all the iniquities of which you have been guilty, and to say, behold the offences which the Almighty has received, which he has borne with all long suffering, which he has repeatedly banished from his remembrance, that he might again draw nigh to you, and again reconcile you to himself; what excuse could you form for neglecting to follow so immediate and so powerful an example? These arguments are actually addressed to your conscience by God himself: *O! thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt. Thou,* I might justly have destroyed, but my power has been exerted to save thee; I might have banished thee for ever from my presence, but I have brought thee back to myself; thy stubbornness, thine insensibility, thy hardness of heart, were sufficient to dry up the sources of my mercy, but still they are overflowing. Shalt thou, whose debts have been forgiven, debts accumulated, under the burden of which thou wast ready to sink, dare, with inexorable rigour, to exact the payment of that inconsiderable debt owing to thee? *I forgave thee all: shouldst not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee?*

But possibly, christians, you are doubtful of the divine forgivenesss: for who can assert that he is worthy of the divine favour? If then, my brethren, you fear that you have not received for-

giveness, let me point out the surest mean for its attainment, the consideration of God, as your *Judge:* and surely this idea with which I conclude the first part of my discourse, is a truth which ought most deeply to impress your minds. In this life, our state, it is true, is too often afflictive, our suspense dreadful: we know that we have sinned, and we know not whether the Almighty has pardoned our sin. The best men have been distressed by this doubt; what then must be the feelings of the most sinful? I will endeavour to terminate this disquieting uncertainty, and to inspire you with a confidence solid and just, founded on the word of God, on the dictates of eternal truth. When our Creator enjoins us to pardon, he adds, to the precept the irrevocable and persuasive promise, that he also will pardon us: *forgive, and ye shall be forgiven.* What a sure foundation for hope; what a strong incentive to charity! It is attended with no ambiguity, no restriction, no exception; it is intelligible and determinate. In these words of our God, spoken by the mouth of his Son, it is not said, forgive, and I will forgive some of your sins; but your transgressions, whatever be their nature, shall be pardoned: *and ye shall be forgiven.* The Almighty does not say, forgive, and I will forgive many of your offences; but, were they in number according to the expression of the prophet, more than the hairs of your head, you shall receive forgiveness of all: *and ye*

shall be forgiven. He does not say, forgive, and after a certain time, I will forgive you; but when you have pardoned your enemy, immediately your sins shall be pardoned: *and ye shall be forgiven.* If then, christians, I pardon the injuries I receive, and pardon them in obedience to God, and from love to him, I may depend with as much certainty on the forgiveness of my sins, as on the infallibility, and inviolable fidelity of my God. Animated with this confidence, I approach his altar, and filled with the veneration due to his infinite majesty, I venture thus to address him:—I am a sinner, and I acknowledge my transgressions before thee, Oh! my God: but, sinful as I am, thou wilt receive me in mercy, for I have exercised mercy according to thy command. The only victim I offer up, is my heart, with its resentments; to thee, Lord, I sacrifice it, and purified by the flame of divine charity, I can offer it with confidence for thine acceptance.

Doubt not, my dear hearer, that when you thus exert yourself, when you thus pour out your heart to your God, he will listen to you, and answer you in those encouraging words: *thy sins are forgiven: go in peace.*

In these various characters, and under these conditions, has not the Almighty a right to enjoin the forgiveness of injuries? But if you refuse this forgiveness, so plainly due, and so expressly com-

manded, do you not render it just, that the Almighty should withhold pardon from yourselves? This consideration forms the *second* part of our subject.

PART. II.

II. Generally speaking, christians, that which we most fear, and which we should feel most grievous and insupportable is, that others should behave to us as we have treated them; that we should be judged as we have judged others, that we should be persecuted and condemned, as we persecute and condemn others. So great is our injustice that we are unwilling to bear the slightest injury from them with whom we are connected in society, whilst we require them to pass by all our offences, to yield every thing we demand, to divest themselves of every thing for our advantage. If, prompted by the natural sentiments of revenge, their concuct towards us resemble our conduct towards them; if they oppose us in the same manner as we oppose them, and if they inflict on us all the severity with which we have treated them, we are afflicted and incensed: but how much more ought we to fear, that with what measure we mete unto others, God will measure to us; that he will be as inexorable to us as we are to our brethren, and that the pardon we are unwilling to grant, will never by him, be granted to ourselves! To this proceedure we expose our-

selves by our harshness and implacability: by thus refusing to conform our conduct to that of the Almighty, we justify him in conforming his conduct to ours; by continuing to refuse our forgiveness to others we acknowledge his right of withholding forgiveness from ourselves; for this malignity of temper renders us singularly criminal; criminal towards *God;* criminal towards *Jesus Christ, the Son of God;* criminal towards our *neighbour*, and criminal towards *ourselves.* Criminal towards *God*, because we violate one of his most essential precepts; criminal towards *Jesus Christ the Son of God*, since we renounce him, by renouncing the most distinguishing mark of christianity; criminal towards our *neighbour* in refusing that which is his due, in consequence of the right with which God has invested him; criminal towards *ourselves*, by acting inconsistently with our own character, and with our daily prayer to heaven, and by pronouncing, in that prayer, our own condemnation.—Attend, my brethren, whilst I lay before you this ample store of moral instruction.

You must not persuade yourselves, that you are at liberty either to grant, or to withhold forgiveness; and that you will be justified in the sight of God, by representing the enormity of the injuries you have received, and inferring the justice of your resentment and vengeance. Whatever your wrongs may be, the Almighty forbids you to yield to the

impulse of your vindictive hearts; however violent the passion which inflames your minds, he commands you to subdue it; for he has reserved to himself the right of avenging your cause, in his own time, and in the manner he sees fit: *Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.* It is not his will that you should suffer unmerited injury, nor that your wrongs should remain unpunished; but if you were constituted judges of your own cause, and allowed yourselves to claim the satisfaction which you may justly expect, all the bonds of society would be destroyed, and charity would cease to exist: to maintain, therefore, the union which he has established in society, and to preserve that charity which is so essential to the happiness of mankind, he enjoins you to rely on him alone for the support of your rights, and to suppress every feeling which would be productive of strife and fatal disunion. This command is so absolute, and so strictly obligatory, that you are required even to quit the altar, to leave there the gift which you were about to offer, and first to be reconciled to your adversary. Without that reconciliation, whatever the sacrifice you offer, it will be rejected by God. How daring, then, is your conduct, when, by shameless discord, or secret alienation, you separate what God hath joined together; and interrupt that peace of which he is the author and guardian! In addition to your earthly adversary, who is thus rendered more irreconcilable than be-

fore, you raise up an enemy in heaven, who, though invisible, is a thousand times more powerful and tremendous: that enemy is God! In acting thus culpably, do you not authorise the Almighty to inflict on you severe and lasting punishment?

No christians! Whilst you remain inexorable to your brethren, cherish not the hope that God will ever be moved to pity. You may prostrate yourselves before him, you may smite your beasts, and with sighs and tears of anguish, implore his elemency; but he will regard you with the same rigor you have shewn to your fellow-man: notwithstanding your sighs and tears, expect from God no other than this awful answer: *he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy.*

Alas! my brethren, how many sinners have quitted this life with unabated malice rankling in their hearts; and how many of those, who in the last extremity, have submitted to an apparent reconciliation, have, in reality, at the moment of their death, felt the same bitter enmity which they had encouraged during many years! For of all the passions, it is certain that none takes deeper root, nor is eradicated with more difficulty, than hatred. There have been professors of christianity who, after they had endured the most cruel torments for the sake of the gospel, and triumphed

over all the efforts of tyrants, have lost their self-possession at the sight of an enemy; and by giving themselves up to resentment, when the victory was almost gained, at once sullied the purity of their religion, and deprived themselves of the crown of martyrdom. Nor am I surprised at this conduct, since nothing is more directly opposed to the spirit of Jesus Christ, than the spirit of revenge, and that malevolence which keeps it alive in the heart. I have before remarked that we become criminal, and excite the divine indignation, by this renunciation of Jesus Christ; for one of the characteristics, and I may even say, the peculiar characteristic of the gospel is that charity which, without distinction of friends or enemies, unites us in heart and mind with all our fellow-creatures; that charity whose influence is so unbounded, that it leads us to *bless them that curse us;* to *pray for them who persecute, and despitefully use us;* to embrace them, and in all their necessities to aid them to the utmost of our power; that charity which actuated the Son of God, our Saviour and our great example, when, from his cross, he raised his voice to heaven to plead for the jews who had demanded his death, the judges by whom he had been condemned, and even the executioners who continued to insult him after his crucifixion: *Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.* Behold brethren, the perfection of the christian law, the

precept which Jesus Christ seems to have most at heart, which he denominated his own, which he pointed out as the mark by which his followers should be distinguished. When we, then, in opposition to the charity so clearly and so earnestly enjoined, alienate ourselves from each other, and live in declared hostility, or, which is still more fatal, in concealed enmity; when we indulge in vehement complaints, on the first offence committed against us, resolving to avenge ourselves by returning censure for censure, calumny for calumny, evil for evil; when, influenced by the fear of man, we shew a feigned moderation, yet cherish a secret venom empoisoning our minds, and which will not fail widely to diffuse itself, though subtilly and unawares, whenever it finds opportunity; when we torment ourselves with thoughts and wishes arising from malignity, and tending to the gratification of our worst passions; when we suffer ourselves to be prejudiced by common opinions, glorying in the revenge we have taken, and believing it would have been disgraceful to bear the injury without procuring satisfaction, by whatever means it were obtained; do we not renounce Jesus Christ in actions, if not in words, since we renounce one of the fundamental maxims of the holy religion which he taught? Do we not prove that we are ashamed of Jesus Christ, when we are ashamed of his words, and of obedience to his law? Let us not deceive ourselves, but let us seriously

reflect, that Jesus Christ is the only mediator, through whom we can obtain the remission of our sins; that he who renounces the Saviour, will be disowned by him, and that whosoever is ashamed of Jesus Christ before men, of him will Jesus Christ be ashamed in the presence of his Father; consequently, that if we refuse to exercise that forgiveness which the Son of God has enjoined and exemplified, we must not rely on his mediation, nor hope, through his merits, to receive pardon of our transgressions.

How strange, my dear hearers! We are christians, christians in profession at least; we never approach the Almighty to supplicate his mercy, without addressing him in the name of Jesus Christ, as brethren of Jesus Christ, and as members of Jesus Christ; yet we encourage sentiments directly opposed to those of our Redeemer; we pursue a conduct totally unlike his; we renounce and dishonour him, by renouncing his gospel; by dishonouring that religion, to the profession of which he has called us. In the primitive ages of christianity, the sign and the glory of christians, was that pacific temper which prevailed amongst them, that agreement of will and union of interest which made them all as one man. This harmony was the subject of astonishment, edification, and delight to the heathens by whom it was witnessed;

and what could be more admirable, more truly great? They beheld amongst men of every country, and of the most dissimilar character, an affection which nothing could diminish; they saw the martyrs enduring patiently, and even joyfully, false accusations, atrocious calumnies, and public disgrace; they beheld those generous soldiers of Jesus Christ, those faithful imitators of his charity, forgiving the cruel rage of their tyrants, and manifesting love for their persecutors, while inflicting on them the most dreadful torments. This was the triumph of christianity: but how is it disgraced when amongst the successors of men so patient, so replete with sentiments of charity, the virtues of patience and charity are scarcely to be found! The disciples of Jesus Christ are now engaged in perpetual contests, and live in eternal discord; every argument of authority, human and divine, is urged to soften and reconcile them, but frequently used in vain.

By refusing to pardon we render ourselves criminal towards our *neighbour*, whose claim on us is granted him by God;—another reason which will engage the Almighty to sentence us according to the dictates of justice untempered with mercy: for the man, whatever he may be, who thus excites your indignation, and to whom you are thus inexorable, is invested in this instance, with the right of his Creator, and God says to you as the

Apostle Paul said to his disciple Philemon, when speaking of Onesimus: *Receive him as myself.* He has injured you and you may demand retribution; but this debt I take upon myself; and for a just compensation, I invest him with the right of claiming that which I may, with still greater justice, claim of you; for you owe even your own self to me, and my right to, and authority over you is absolute and unlimited: *If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that to mine account. Albeit, I do not say to thee, how thou owest me even thine own self besides.* Your God in his word addresses you in similar language, and hence your brother, with all his faults, has a right to expect from you not only lenity, but unreserved forgiveness. But you violate all his rights, and think only of maintaining your own, which you value too highly, which you exaggerate, which you demand with an arrogance and rigour, by you termed impartiality and justice, but which may be termed inhumanity, cruelty, and at times ferocity:—For who has not observed the furious conduct that arises from the passion of revenge? The vindictive man acts without precaution, and believes every outrage allowable. No angry words, no unkind actions, are, in his opinion, too severe a return for an offence misrepresented by his imagination, and aggravated by his susceptibility. For one unfriendly action, he retorts many injuries; for one offen-

sive word, he utters unceasing invectives; for a momentary fault, he continues, during a number of years, or during the whole of his existence, to vex, oppose and persecute the offender, and if possible, to overwhelm him with affliction. Why are men so unjust? Because, blinded by self-love, they fondly dwell on their own pretended rights, and lose sight of the real and undeniable rights with which God has invested others.

After you have thus acted, go to the altar and pray in the words which Jesus has himself taught you; go, and in the presence of the God of glory, plead against your own actions, pronounce your own sentence, and utter your own condemnation. By refusing to pardon others, you become criminal towards *yourselves*. With this awful thought I shall conclude my discourse.

In our daily prayer, we say to our God, *Father, forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors*. Such is our language; but if we comprehend the meaning, yet cherish a sentiment which envenoms our souls, our prayer for mercy becomes an abomination in the sight of God; it is a prayer which we should tremble to offer, which we should regard as a sentence of death, as the most tremendous curse that can fall on our heads. For, is not the use of this prayer a self-contradiction; a self-condemnation? We contradict our-

selves if we speak in opposition to our thoughts; if we dare to use the language of this petition, if we do not in our hearts consent, that the forgiveness of God should depend on our forgiveness of our brethren. We condemn ourselves if we ask forgiveness on this condition alone, yet refuse to forgive our fellow-creatures; and thus demand our own punishment.

When we pray; *forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors,* whilst in reality we never prevail on ourselves to grant forgiveness, what do our words import? In offering this petition to God, we virtually say:—Lord, as I cherish in my heart an implacable aversion, so do thou regard me with inexorable hatred; and as I constantly refuse to see the man who has injured me, so do thou for ever prohibit me from beholding thee in thy kingdom. Effect my destruction, as I have laboured to effect his; and cover me with confusion, as I have overwhelmed him with disgrace.

Forgive Lord, as I forgive: as the reconciliation to which I have yielded was merely apparent, grant not to me a real forgiveness: I am ever inimical, be thou still unreconciled to me: notwithstanding the promise I have given, my vengeance waits but for a favourable occasion: in like manner, use the various opportunities in thy power, to inflict on me thy vengeance.

Forgive, as I forgive! I have pardoned my enemy; but in pardoning, I believe, or rather wish to believe, it is sufficient to refrain from injuring him, without endeavouring to promote his happiness, or to render him any assistance; do thou, likewise, abandon my interest, and disregard my welfare; bereave me of all thy gifts, refuse me thy favour, thy succour, thy blessing.

Are these the petitions of which you desire the fulfilment? They are, however, such as you offer, and such as the Almighty, in his judgment, will answer. Ah! my brethren, what conviction, and what horror will strike your minds, when God shall banish you from his presence, saying to each of you; *out of thine own mouth will I judge thee.* The sentence of my justice, the sentence by which your banishment is decreed, appears unmerciful, and fills you with consternation and despair; but, it is the accomplishment of your own prayers, in which you have continually implored your condemnation. In observing the rule prescribed by yourself, have you any reason to complain? I forgive as you have forgiven; or rather, as you have refused forgiveness, I refuse to forgive you: *out of thine own mouth have I judged thee.—Depart!*

You are called upon, my brethren, maturely to consider this awful sentence, and then to make

your final resolve; for there is no alternative; you must exercise forgiveness, or incur the wrath of the Omnipotent. And will you, then, procure an useless satisfaction at so vast a price? Is the reparation of an injury of such importance, that you will seek it at the hazard of your salvation; at the hazard of your soul? In hating and persecuting your enemies, would you not be more inimical to yourselves than to them? What will be your own reflections, and the reflections of others, at your dying hour? Will you dare to quit this life with the malignant feelings you now encourage? Would not such obduracy be offensive to the world itself, which, notwithstanding its false principles, is betrayed into manifest inconsistency by the homage which truth extorts, and consequently would condemn the unrelenting temper of that man who carries his resentment to the grave? Why will you not do that at the present moment, which you will one day be compelled to do, when it will be unavailing:—for what are those reconciliations, effected on the verge of eternity, and what can be expected from that which too probably, is but an unmeaning form? If some victories over your own hearts must be obtained, you will be amply recompensed by the joy which attends those victories. Never did Joseph feel more exquisite delight than when he embraced his brethren, by whom he had been

so grossly injured: he wept, but his tears flowed not from grief, but from the purest and most heartful joy.

May we never forget, my dear hearers, that we are sinful, and that our sins are numberless. As transgressors, we are wholly dependent on divine forgiveness. Let us be ever ready to pardon; then may we hope to experience the mercy of God, in time and in eternity.

SERMON VIII.

ON PROVIDENCE.

[Preached before Lewis XIV.]

JOHN, vi, 5, 6.

When Jesus then lift up his eyes, and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Philip, whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat? And this he said to prove him: for he himself knew what he would do.

MIRACLES, it has been said, are the voice of God; and whenever he manifests those tokens of Omnipotence, he designs to instruct, and to teach us some important truth. Let us then consult the miracles of Jesus Christ, and listen to them with deep attention; for he is essentially the word of God; and not his words only, but even his actions speak to us in a clear and impressive language. We are taught by this great miracle,—the speedy and abundant supply of food, that there is a providence which governs the world; a providence to which it is our duty to submit, not like the rest of the creation by a submission of necessity, but as rational beings, by a free and voluntary resignation. Such, my brethren, is the voice of God,

and the doctrine it teaches: but however intelligible, however audible that voice, there are men who refuse to hear it; there are men who have heard it without learning its doctrines, and obeying its precepts; and therefore to the voice of our Saviour's miracle I add the voice of pastoral instruction, which will produce, if strengthened by the grace of God shed abroad in our hearts, all the happy effects I anticipate from this discourse.

There are two things by which man is impressed: his duty, and his interest: the call of duty addresses his reason; that of interest is self-love: both these springs of conduct must be at once set in motion, to have full power in the human heart; for the motives of duty without interest are feeble and inefficacious, and those of interest alone are mean and disgraceful; but when united, their virtue is almost infallible. I shall therefore attempt, my dear hearers, to inspire you with perfect submission to the providence of God; to demonstrate the indispensable obligation we are under to rely on that providence, and to conform our lives to its dictates: for this end, I design to shew you the guilt and misery of him who yields not this obedience. His guilt is deducible from the principles of duty, and his misery from the grounds of interest. Guilt and misery are here inseparable; for sin is infallibly the source of unhappiness, and unhappiness is, according to the laws of God, the

just punishment of sin. The wisest and the happiest of men is the christian, whose faith in divine providence is the rule of all his actions, and the ground of all his confidence. On the contrary, no *guilt* can exceed that of the worldly-minded man, who obeys not the dictates of providence: this is my first head. No *misery* can exceed that of the worldly-minded man, who will not resign himself to the conduct of providence: this is the second head of my discourse.

PART I.

I. To correct an evil, we must become acquainted with its nature, and discover its principle. I refer, my brethren, to the conduct of the worldly-minded man who lives in total forgetfulness of God; who appears to have shaken off the divine yoke; who has constantly endeavoured to render himself independent of the Deity; the man, in short, who by habitually acting according to his own licentious will, although his sentiments are not openly declared, is become, if I may so speak, an apostate from the providence of God: this course of action is most criminal, yet it is rendered common by the depravity of the age.

He who renounces divine providence, and disallows the authority of God, is actuated by a spirit of infidelity, or by a defection of the heart;

he either disbelieves the existence of providence, or acknowledges its existence, yet submits not to its guidance. Let us examine these two principles, and discover which of them occasions the most gross and culpable error.

If a spirit of infidelity be the motive for disbelieving a providence, what error is so palpable? The infidel disbelieves that which is not only worthy of belief, but the foundation of all that is credible; he disbelieves that which the most intelligent of the heathens discerned solely by the light of reason; he disbelieves that which experience, independently of faith, is continually proving; that which on numberless occasions we are compelled, by the strongest sentiments of nature to acknowledge; nay, he disbelieves the most incontestable truth for the very reasons by which it is established, and which are more than sufficient for our conviction.

Such is the condition of the worldling who resists the doctrine of divine providence: his sight is obscured even in the source of light, which is the existence of God; for the providence of the Almighty is the first, the most immediate consequence of his being. In renouncing the doctrine of providence, then, he is either guilty of the horrid impiety of disbelieving the existence of God, or else he represents the Creator as a being shock-

ing to our imagination; a God who is unmindful of his creatures, who interests himself neither for their preservation nor their perfection; a God who is neither just nor wise, nor merciful; for all these attributes imply the exercise of providence. Hence the man who denies the superintending care of the Almighty, in the midst of christianity becomes worse than a heathen; or, whilst professing the christian faith, adopts the worst part of paganism; since we scarcely hear of any sects amongst the heathens, who denied, or even doubted the providence of God, except those whose infamous tenets led to the most degrading excesses, and the most loathsome impurities; those for whose sake it was desirable that the world should be without God, without law, without punishments, without rewards, without providence, without justice.

As it is the privilege of the believer to hope, according to the words of the Apostle, against hope; so it is the crime of the worldling, on the subject of divine providence, to be incredulous and unreasonable even against reason: for he unconsciously admits, by the mere instinct of reason, the idea of that providence which he denies. He believes that a state cannot be well governed without the wisdom and deliberation of a prince; he believes that a family cannot subsist without the vigilance and economy of a parent; he believes

that a vessel cannot be safely steered without the attention and skill of a pilot; and when he beholds a vessel sailing in the ocean, when he observes a family under proper regulation, and a kingdom enjoying order and tranquillity, he concludes without hesitation that there exists an intelligent, presiding spirit: but he argues far otherwise with respect to the world at large; imagining that by chance alone, without the aid of providence, without the direction of mind, this widely extended universe is capable of preserving itself in the astonishing order we contemplate! Does he not then argue in opposition to the light of nature, and contrary to the dictates of reason? Consider likewise the striking proofs offered by his own experience, against which he appears hardened, and blinded by invincible obstinacy. Every man, when revolving in his mind the years of his past life, and recollecting each occurrence, ought to stop at certain points of time; at situations in which he has been placed, at dangers which he has passed through, at extraordinary events, whether prosperous or adverse, which have struck him with astonishment; all of which are visible signs of divine providence. This remark is just, in a greater or less degree, with respect to men of every description; but it applies more particularly to them who are in conspicuous stations, to them who enter most deeply into the commerce and intrigues of the world, and

to them, most of all, who live in the centre of the world, the court. What is the world? Is it not the great theatre, and the great school of providence, in which a little reflection is sufficient to point out continual proofs of a power, and of wisdom superior to that of men, and which sports with their designs; which appoints their destiny, which elevates. and abases, which impovershes, and makes rich, which dejects and animates; which disposes of all things as the supreme arbiter. According to our usual mode of reasoning, there is no class of men who ought to be more firmly persuaded of divine providence than they who value themselves on their knowledge of the world, and who profess to be the sages of the world; but generally speaking, we find none more ready to deny its existence. As no man on earth could have been more inexcusable for admitting a doubt on the subject of providence than the patriarch Joseph, after the transcendent miracles which God had performed in his favour, so are these men peculiarly culpable in rejecting the providence of God, because they withhold the honour due to him for an attribute, in the knowledge of which he delights, if I may so speak, to instruct mankind.

Unbelievers of this description refuse to make voluntarily, and as christians, that avowal of providence which they frequently make from necessity,

or rather, from the impulse of rage and despair. The worldling who forgets God and his providence, whilst he lives in prosperity, and all his wishes are accomplished, is the first to murmur against providence and against God, when he is overtaken by unexpected calamity: appearing to find an alleviation of his grief in having an object of censure, he accuses God, and absurdly contradicts himself, by ascribing, from a spirit of arrogance and impiety, his misfortune to the providence he had before denied. Can we imagine any thing more irrational than to disown the providence of God, when submission to it is required, and to acknowledge that providence merely to outrage it? But of all things it appears most strange, that the libertine should become doubtful of divine providence from the very reasons by which it is clearly demonstrated, and which ought to establish his faith. His doubts are founded on the irregularities prevalent in the world, which are, in reality, proofs of its existence: for, why are those irregularities which are so common in the world, considered irregularities? Why do they appear to him irregularities, unless it be that they are repugnant to order? And what is that order to which they are repugnant, but the providence of God? He derives an objection, then, from that which obviates his objection; he is rendered incredulous by that which ought to strengthen his belief. If there were a providence, he argues, should we see

so many vices in society, at which even the world in general are offended? Is not the aversion, I reply, with which the world contemplate those irregularities, an authentic proof of a divine providence, which will not permit the public sanction of vice, and has therefore decreed that amongst mankind it shall ever bear the stamp of infamy? If men no longer regarded vice with indignation, we might be doubtful of providence, and the wicked man might *say in his heart, there is no God:* but whilst the world itself condemns licentiousness, whilst impiety is abhorred, whilst iniquity is held in general detestation, providence is shielded from every attack. Mankind will ever be offended with vice, because there will ever exist a God and a providence. It is true that the world will continue to exhibit the most disgraceful crimes, to be stained with the blackest perfidy and ingratitude; but those crimes will be disgraceful, only because there is a providence which brands them with ignominy; that perfidy and ingratitude will be abhorred, only because there is a providence which teaches us to venerate honour and integrity. Men will perform actions for which they will blush, for which they will reproach themselves, which they will not dare to acknowledge; but that disavowal, that remorse, that confusion, are so many arguments in favour of a providence. If, on the contrary, those actions were acknowledged without

shame or remorse, with what powerful arguments would the unbeliever be furnished. How egregious then the error of him who renounces providence from a spirit of incredulity!

But let us suppose this renunciation to proceed merely from a revolt of the heart, with no change of belief:—it is an error, my brethren, still less pardonable, to be convinced of a superintending providence, and yet refuse co-operation with that providence, and obedience to its authority; to be so rash, so insensate rather, as not only to aim at independence, but to hope for success whilst acting in defiance of providence. Such, however, is the error to which a worldly spirit imperceptibly leads. Men of the world whilst assured of divine providence, act as if they believed it not: (attend, my dear hearers, and acknowledge your own resemblance:) they believe in the existence of providence, yet in worldly concerns manifest the same inquietude, the same eagerness, the same impatience, the same forgetfulness of God in prosperity, the same dejection in adversity, the same presumption in their undertakings, as if that providence were but an empty name. If our conduct were properly influenced by the belief of providence; that is to say, if we were constantly mindful of providence, if we regarded ourselves as subjects born to fulfill its commands, we should become perfectly reasonable: we should be nei-

ther impetuous, vain, restless, proud, jealous, ungrateful towards God, nor unjust towards men; submissive to the dictates of providence, we should regard our interest without undue attachment, our claims without ambition, our advantages without pride; we should not abuse either our enjoyments or sufferings, and in all things we should preserve that virtuous moderation of sentiments and desires, which would render us modest in prosperity, and patient in adversity; for this is the natural result of the believer's resignation to the providence of God: but since the spirit of the world reigning in our hearts occasions us to abandon his providence, we inevitably fall into numberless errors: we receive blessings at the hand of God without gratitude, and chastisement without profit; by that which ought to convert us we are hardened, and by that which ought to sanctify us, we are irritated and driven to despair; when we are called to humble ourselves, we become arrogant, and we resign ourselves to grief, when we ought to receive consolation, and to bless the Almighty: influenced by envy, we extract pain from the success of other men, and from their sorrow we derive malignant joy. All the feelings of our hearts are, as it were, out of place, because they are no longer regulated by faith in divine providence. O! my God, are we not of all creatures the most sinful, when we reject thine infallible gui-

dance, to wander in crooked and deceitful paths in which we stumble at every step!

The man of the world, christians, who throws off his dependence on the providence of the Almighty, is resolved either to follow blindly the course of fortune, whose current bears away the feeble mind, or to govern himself according to the views of human prudence, by which the votaries of the world are actuated. You will allow that each of these motives is an outrage against God. In giving up every principle of conduct, and resigning himself to the power of fortune, does not the worldling fall into the idolatry of the heathen, who instead of adoring the Almighty, whose wisdom appeared in the government of the world, chose rather to worship a deity whom they denominated *fortune?* To this deity they erected temples, they invoked her in every exigence, they offered her expiatory sacrifices, they gratefully acknowledged her imagined kindness: and this idolatry which is imitated amongst christians, incensed even the heathen philnsophers themselves. "How infamous," exclaimed one of them,* "to behold fortune every where adored, every where invoked, and even in contempt of the God every where revered as the divinity of the world!"

Is not this the sin with which God reproached the Israelites, in those words of Isaiah: *But ye*

* Pliny.

are they that forsake the Lord, that forget my holy mountain, that prepare a table for that troop, and that furnish the drink offering unto that number. This sacrilege, my brethren, has not only been the crime of the Jews and Pagans; we behold it in the midst of christianity, and more particularly at the court, where it is a vice the most predominant. Yes, my dear hearers, and you know this truth better than I do, the idol of the court is fortune; it is at the court she is adored: it is at the court where every thing is sacrificed to this idol;—tranquillity, health, liberty, and even conscience and salvation. At the court fortune is the regulator of friendship, esteem, civility, service, and even duty. The man richly endowed by fortune, becomes a divinity in our eyes, his vices become virtues, his words are oracles, his will is law. Yes, I will be bold to say, were a demon sent from the infernal regions, and advanced to a state of high elevation and favour, there would be found men to offer him incense! But if the man thus idolized falls from his elevation, and we find him no more in place, how little is he regarded! All his false worshippers disappear, and they are the first to forget him. Why? Because he is no longer the representative of the idol they adore. In such conduct, self-interest is the object of pursuit; but to seek our interest out of God and his providence, is the grand error; the error from which even the virtuous and the wise are not wholly ex-

empt. It is not, I own, absolutely forbidden to serve those who are in high stations, provided we regard them as the ministers of providence: then our reliance on them is in conformity to the will of God, and we are not desirous of employing them, as they too generally are, to oppress one, to supplant another, to support injustice, and to render iniquity triumphant.

We are apt to imagine that they who forsake God in order to guide themselves by the rules of human prudence, are less liable to err than the former class; but in this we are mistaken. We find temerity in the partisans of fortune, but greater arrogance in the professors of worldly-wisdom. Nothing is more offensive to the Almighty than pride; and where is pride more apparent than in the conduct of him who, confidently depending on himself alone, believes he is sufficiently enlightened to govern himself, and to exult in his success, like those impious men spoken of in scripture, who say; *our hand is high, and the Lord hath not done all this?* Is it not the height of pride to say; I have rendered myself all that I am; my own industry, my own exertion has procured me these benefits; the establishment of my family, the success of my affairs, the rank to which I have attained, are all the work of my own hand, and not of the hand of God! Surely it is arrogance in the extreme to imagine, that although we

are unable to dispense with the counsel of our fellow creatures, we are capable of guiding ourselves without the counsel of God. How arrogant, for instance, is the father who from the maxims of worldly-wisdom alone, believes himself enabled to determine the vocation of his children, to assign their employments, to point out their path, without considering whether he is directing them agreeably to the word of God. Since these things are so intimately connected with his own salvation, and that of his children, to what fearful consequences does he not expose himself and them? When a man undertakes to govern himself independently of his Creator, he becomes responsible for the effects of his temerity; and as human prudence, when most refined, is subject to innumerable errors, who can say how many sins he shall accumulate, for which he must one day render an account to the sovereign Judge? If I decide, after having recourse to heaven, that is to say, after having maturely deliberated according to the spirit of my religion, and earnestly endeavour to learn the will of God, I may then believe with confidence, that my decision is safe, or that if I fail, God will supply my defect; that if I wander, he will find means to restore me to the right path; and that he will not impute criminality to my error; since I shall have followed, to the utmost of my power, the rules of christian prudence, by imploring the Almighty to enlighten my understanding, and by using every

means afforded me for obtaining the knowledge of his will: but when I assume the guidance of myself, I become responsible for all my actions; responsible to God who, vigilant in the protection of his rights, and offended with my arrogance, withdraws from me his grace. Into what a fearful abyss does the votary of human wisdom thus precipitate himself? If a father, to return to the example we have given, disposes of his children according to the maxims of that destructive worldly-policy, which to him is law, what is the result? To elevate one, he sacrifices all the rest; from partiality to some, he is altogether unjust to others; he places those in the church, who are more capable of fulfilling their duty in the world; and engages those in secular occupations, who might be usefully employed in the service of the church: and since their temporal condition has an almost infalfallible influence on their eternal destiny, in thus appointing their station, he promotes their condemnation, and his own. Had, he as a christian parent, addressed his prayers to God, he would have been preserved from all these errors; but he listened to himself alone, and in thus listening to himself, he became personally responsible before God; he became the author of his children's and his own perdition.

Let us then attend to that excellent prayer addressed to the most high by the wisest of men:

Give me wisdom that sitteth by thy throne, that being present, she may labour with me, that I may know what is pleasing unto thee:—a prayer, my dear hearers, which each of us ought every day of our lives to offer up: a prayer to which the Almighty will listen, being a sincere homage rendered to his providence: a prayer which will draw down the most ample blessings of heaven; for in honouring the Almighty, it interests him in our behalf. Without this submission to the providence of our God, we shall be not only the most *criminal*, but, as I shall prove, secondly, the most *unhappy* of men.

PART II.

II. It is an admirable remark of an ancient writer, that our Creator would not be God if we could find solid happiness out of him; and that the unhappiness we suffer when estranged from him by sin, is the most convincing proof that he is our chief end, our sovereign good. Thou, Lord, hast so ordained, adds the same writer, and our experience daily proves, that when the soul becomes rebellious, and renounces its obedience to thee, and dependence on thy power, it feels in itself a source of misery.

Why, my brethren, is a voluntary estrangement from God, and rejection of the laws of providence,

the greatest misery to which man is liable? Because in renouncing that adorable providence, he remains destitute of a guide, or abandoned to his own guidance, the never-failing source of evil: in forsaking God, he consents that God should forsake him, and withdraw that paternal care which, according to the scripture, constitutes the felicity of the righteous whilst on earth: he deprives himself of the sweetest, or rather of the only alleviation of severe affliction; for, in many instances, nothing but faith in divine providence can sustain his fortitude: and lastly, although he is no longer freely and willingly dependant on God, he cannot exempt himself from constrained submission to his will; although he refuses to yield obedience to the law of love, he is unable to avoid subjection to the law of justice. Each of these reasons would demand a separate discourse to shew its whole force and extent, but a short and simple illustration will, I hope, be sufficient to convince, and suitably affect your minds.

Figure to yourselves a vessel well fitted out and provided with stores, but tossed on a tempestuous sea, at the mercy of the winds and waves, without the directing hand of a pilot: such is man in the wide sea of life, when no longer guided by the hand of God. Destitute of providence, on what can he rely? Were it possible to find some other ground of confidence, his state would be less pi-

tiable; but he is forced to acknowledge that in renouncing divine providence, and casting off the yoke of Jesus Christ, he is reduced to the alternative of placing his trust in men, or of relying solely on himself;—two conditions equally gloomy; and whichever he may prefer, he is inevitably and undeniably miserable. If rightly considered, what can be more dreadful than to be reduced to this self-dependence; and if a man be at all acquainted with his own heart, what state is so likely to deprive him of all happiness? Were I left without a guide in a frightful solitude, exposed to the danger of being irrecoverably lost, I should be seized with extreme terror. Were I abandoned in a dangerous malady, and left entirely to my own care, I could no longer venture to hope for recovery. Were I on a charge which affected not only my fortune, but my life, denied the aid of counsel, I should believe myself inevitably lost. How can I then be free from perpetual alarms in the midst of a world where I am surrounded by so many snares, where I am menaced with so many dangers, where I am pursued by so many foes, where, if protected by no power but my own, I am so liable to perish? Christians, that which constitutes the misery of man, is his obstinate determination of depending on himself alone: his unhappiness is not the effect of any thing external, of that which is placed above him, or of that which most violently opposes him; he is himself

the source of all his afflictions, by assuming the regulation of his own actions: and this must of necessity be the case; for as the thoughts of man are uncertain, timid, and confused, especially with regard to himself, when left to his own direction, he is perturbed and irresolute, uncertain of every thing, universally mistrustful, the sport of his own caprice and variableness, and the slave of an unreasonable temper. He is torn by numberless, contrary, and contending passions; absorbed in his own mind, he is alternately depressed with sadness, agitated with terror, envenomed with hatred, infatuated with love, devoured with boundless ambition, withered with malignant envy, transported with rage, overwhelmed with grief: he finds in himself a source of anguish; an absolute hell!

It is true, christians, that man is endued with reason, which is superior to all these passions, whose aid he is entitled and commanded to claim: but if in some instances the aid of reason be useful, in others what suffering does it not inflict! To what purpose, it has been said, does man employ that reason which is not subjected to God, which has no addition to its own feeble light? It serves but to render him more unhappy, to discover blessings he cannot obtain, to point out evils he cannot avoid, to excite desires he can never satisfy, to occasion repentance for ever tor-

menting him, to make him averse to all that he possesses, and desirous of all that he cannot obtain, to make him the more clearly perceive numberless indignities at which he revolts, numberless acts of injustice which hurry him to desperation! He reasons on every subject, but his reasoning is a source of trouble; he foresees every thing, but his foresight confounds him. He affects wisdom, but his worldly wisdom is the origin of all his suffering. Were he to resign himself to the guidance of his God, the consciousness of a providence continually watching over him would fix his thoughts, limit his desires, soften his passions, strengthen his reason; and in this stillness of the soul he would be truly happy: but in seeking happiness in himself, independently of God, he finds nothing but discontent and misery.

In this situation, what resource is open to him? Convinced of his own insufficiency, and unwilling to turn to God, does he then place his confidence in his fellow-creatures? Ah! my dear hearers, this is a source of still greater misery. *Thus saith the* LORD, *cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm.* What servility, to say no more, is connected with this dependence? How degrading to cast off the yoke of God, and bend the neck to that of man; to live according to the will of a fellow-mortal, to exist but by his favour, to have no other will than his;

to be ever obliged to anticipate his wishes, to address him with caution, and to flatter his vanity; to be in continual anxiety lest he should be displeased, and his favour should cease. What slavery can be more wearisome and oppressive? But to depend on my God, whose providence will never suffer me to want, constitutes my felicity, and enables me to exclaim with St. Paul, *I know whom I have believed.* On the contrary, to have rejected the protection of the Almighty, and to reflect that we have committed our destiny to the hands of inconstant, selfish men; men whose attachment to us arises solely from a regard to their own interest, and who would abandon us without remorse the moment we became burthensome, or unable to render them future service; ah! christians, if feeling were still alive in our breasts, would not this be the source of inconceivable misery?

Were it possible for the protection of men to be equally beneficial with the benignant providence of God, it is natural to imagine it must be the protection of princes; whom we regard as Gods upon earth, and of their ministers and favourites, who appear to be all powerful in this world: but in these the sacred writings forbid us to place our hopes, lest we build on a ruinous foundation: *put not your trust in princes.* Experience also enforces the prohibition; for such is the effect of the just displeasure of God, that in seeking the favour

of princes, with unremitting solicitude, multitudes daily fall a sacrifice to falsehood and desertion, and consequently prove that *in the son of man*, even with respect to worldly happiness, *there is no help.*

Yet, my brethren, such is the blindness of men that, although persuaded of a truth, so strongly evinced and so important in its nature, they continue obstinately to oppose it, chusing rather to be unhappy by depending on the creature, than to be happy by subjecting themselves to the Creator. Notwithstanding the cruel proofs daily experienced of the indifference, harshness, and insensibility of these false divinities of the earth, their worshippers are still so infatuated as to remain oppressed with suffering whilst relying on them, instead of throwing off the servile yoke and enjoying their liberty, by exercising a holy confidence in their God. Ask these idolaters of princely favour, these partisans and slaves of the world, what is passing in their hearts, and see if there be one of them who will deny that his situation is embittered by a thousand sorrows, disgusts and mortifications, and that he lives in perpetual captivity. Do they not acknowledge this, even in the midst of prosperity? But when they are disappointed, after a series of intrigues; when, by the disgrace into which they unexpectedly fall, all their designs are disconcer-

ted and overthrown, and they find themselves forgotten, neglected, despised, then, my dear hearers, they render a solemn homage to that providence, whose care they had refused: then does the Almighty demand in that language of just indignation addressed to the Jews:—*Where are your Gods, and your rock in whom you trusted;* those protectors, of whose support you were so assured, by whose favour you were so elated, the objects of your worship, and on whom you depended? Address your supplications to these your Gods, whom you have served, and in the extremity to which you are reduced, and the abyss into which you are fallen, *let them rise up and help you, and be your protection.*

What consolation, my brethren, remains for him who after having himself forsaken God, is thus rejected of God? What consolation can he obtain in those situations in which nothing but faith in providence can support the mind? Whilst animated by faith in the divine government, and firmly persuaded that there is a God by whom good and evil is dispensed, so that every thing which befalls me is ordained by him for my salvation and his own glory, I have within myself a source of comfort under every affliction. However intractable, however rebellious the sentiments of nature, I am still, by the higher faculties of my soul, by the sentiments derived from faith, ena-

bled to say:—why do I murmur and complain? These things are ordained by the Almighty, and to his will it is my duty to submit. By this reflection I may reprove myself, nevertheless it inspires me with consolation and fortitude; and on every painful event becomes a never failing resource. But if I banish the idea of providence from my mind, when overtaken by a calamity which baffles human reason, which can receive no alleviation from the world, what remains for me but to drink of that bitter cup *in the hand of the Lord*, of which the Psalmist declares, *the dregs thereof all the wicked of the earth shall wring out, and drink!*

In the ordinary vicissitudes of life, nothing is more common than those afflictions which are inconsolable by the world; and they are permitted by God, to demonstrate more clearly the necessity of his providence, and to shew us the difference between them who rely on its care, and them who reject its guidance; for the righteous man when afflicted, persecuted, and oppressed, remains unruffled; *in patience possessing his soul*, and enjoying that *peace of God which passeth all understanding:* from his own sufferings he derives consolation; he contemplates that providence which directs the universe, and rejoices in being conformed to its orders. *The* LORD *gave*, he exclaims, *and*

the LORD *hath taken away; blessed be the name of the* LORD! But the ungodly under the stroke of calamity, blasphemes his maker, abhors the whole earth, reviles his friends, becomes infuriate against his foes, and abandons himself to hopeless misery: like the rich man in hell, whose raging thirst was unallayed by one drop of water, he is tortured with fierce despair unallayed by one drop of heavenly consolation. In the providence of God that consolation was offered, but he turned from the refreshing stream, and now its source is for ever dried. He then who denies a providence, destroys his own felicity; since the felicity of man consists in believing the providence of God, and in submitting himself to its dictates.

But what do I say christians? Is not even the worldling, rebel as he is, under the dominion of providence? Yes, and notwithstanding his resistance, he ever will be; but this constrained submission is the completion of his misery. There are two kinds of providence exercised by the Almighty over his creatures; one is full of justice and severity, the other replete with kindness and mercy; and when the sinner rejects the benignant providence which invites him to security and peace, he is subjugated by that providence whose dominion is absolute and uncontroulable. His Creator by his judgments thus addresses him:—Thou hast rejected the law of mercy, therefore thou shalt

submit to the law of justice; for I have eternally and irrevocably appointed those laws for the government of the world, and their authority extends over all men, without exception. Thou wouldest not yield to the providence of my love; henceforth thou shalt be ruled by the providence of my justice. Thou shalt feel its influence in secret chastisement, and public vengeance; at one time in prosperity which will intoxicate, at another, in adversity which will overwhelm thee; at one time in pleasures which will empoison thy heart; at another in grief, which against thy own will, will agitate and irritate, without correcting thee, thus making thee feel thy dependance.—In this manner has the Almighty frequently shewn his power over the hardened sinner; over a Pharaoh, a Nebuchadnezzar, an Antiochus, and many others. They refused to own him as a father, but they were forced to acknowledge him as a judge; they refused to glorify his goodness, but they involuntarily glorified his sovereignty. *I will set thee as a gazing stock*, said God, by the prophet Nahum, to the polluted city of Nineveh; the menace was fully accomplished in the ruin of that city, and it has been again, and again accomplished in the desolation of the Jewish people. Their chastisement is a perpetual miracle to demonstrate the providence of an offended Deity; a miracle which alone is sufficient to convince the most incredulous, that there exists a Supreme, Almighty governor of the world, before

whom it is the duty of all creatures to humble themselves; whom it is the duty of all creatures to obey. If then, my brethren, we regard either our duty or our interest, let us resign ourselves to his providence. To him let us submit all our designs, and whilst we diligently employ our faculties and powers, whilst we use every rational means of success, let us calmly and unreservedly depend on him for the event. Let us bless him equally for the good and the evil he communicates receiving the good with thankfulness, and bearing the evil with resignation. Let us pray without ceasing that his purposes may be accomplished in us; that *his will may be done on earth and in heaven;* on earth, where he sanctifies us; in heaven, where he will crown us with glory.

SERMON IX.

ON THE FEAR OF DEATH.

LUKE vii. 12, 13.

Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, weep not.

AMONGST the various afflicting circumstances which our Saviour felt on this melancholy occasion, that which affected him most sensibly, and appeared most worthy of his compassion, was the imperfection and weakness of the mother, bewailing the death of her son. He pitied her excessive attachment to that son; he pitied her want of submission to the dispensations of providence; he pitied the unbelief, which led her to regard death with those sentiments so natural to the human heart. He pitied not only this individual, but all who have not acquired those just views which ought to strengthen the mind of a christian: those who, from weak timidity, reflect on death

with gloomy apprehension, instead of deriving from it motives for the noblest virtues that can adorn their lives. This compassion of the Son of God will engage our attention, my brethren, in the present discourse. I shall undertake to shew its reasonableness, and to prove that nothing is more to be regretted, than the feelings which the generality of christians indulge when death is the object of their meditation. In every thing our weakness is apparent, but on this occasion it is carried to the greatest excess. The idea of death is distressing and tremendous to our minds; we can scarcely reflect on it for a moment without grief and disquietude. At the slightest danger with which we are menaced, at the first symptoms of a disease which may terminate our existence, we are alarmed, agitated, and dismayed. It is my intention, my dear hearers, to fortify your hearts against the alarm and agitation to which they are subject, by leading you to form sentiments of death more consonant with the christianity you profess, by representing it under a less terrific form than you have hitherto imagined, and by suppressing, or at least regulating that immoderate fear which sometimes renders you pusillanimous in the extreme.

To give you an idea of my subject, I shall point out three descriptions of persons who are alarmed at the thought of death. The first are libertines

and atheists; they fear death in consequence of their infidelity: the second are the worldly minded, the ambitious, the selfish, and the voluptuous; they fear death from their undue attachment to the enjoyments of this life: the third are the general class of men, not excepting philosophers and christians, who fear death from a sentiment inherent in our nature. These causes of apprehension are different, yet they produce nearly the same effect, acting in various ways, and by various motives. They are the most culpable in whom the fear of death arises from infidelity, or undue attachment to the enjoyments of this life: they are the most excusable in whom it arises from a natural aversion; but the condition of both these descriptions is calculated to excite our pity, and that of Jesus Christ. Libertines and atheists fear death because they are ignorant of any other life than the present, and consequently believe, that with respect to them, all will become extinct at the moment of their death: this infidelity we ought to detest. The votaries of earthly pleasure fear death, because they love the world, and are aware that death will separate them from it: of this attachment to the world we ought to divest ourselves. Mankind in general fear death, because nature revolts at the violent separation of soul and body: religion ought to correct this natural weakness.

Nothing is more awful than the condition of the unbeliever or the libertine, who fears death from the delusions of infidelity.

Nothing is more melancholy than the state of the votary of pleasure, who fears death from his attachment to the world.

Nothing is more unreasonable than the feelings of any man, especially a christian, who fears death because he has neglected to fortify his mind by the motives of religion.

These three ideas will form the divisions of my discourse. I shall take occasion, in concluding, to address these likewise who are afraid of death from too strong an apprehension of the judgment of God, and to regulate their opinions on that subject.

PART I.

I. A knowledge of the world will justify that remark of Tertullian, respecting the unbeliever, whom the scripture accuses of folly, because, although endued with natural reason, he *hath said in his heart, there is no God:* he observes that no man ever disbelieved the existence of a divine first cause, but him whose interest and wishes led him to the system of atheism. The same may be

said of them, who, reasoning from their feelings alone, and prejudiced by the false maxims of licentiousness, either doubt, or entirely disbelieve a future life: for I maintain that no one ever doubted a future state of existence, unless his interest required this incredulity, that is to say, unless his disorderly and corrupt life rendered it desirable that death should terminate all his prospects. But after all, my brethren, this species of infidelity, by whatever hardness of heart, or imaginary strength of mind it may be accompanied, does not deliver men from the fear of death: unbelievers, on the contrary, are alarmed at the thought of death because they have no consolatory idea of a future state; and their fear, at the same time, is aggravated by a degree of uncertainty which infidelity itself cannot dispel.

Men of this description are deserving of pity, although indignation will mingle with that pity; for nothing is more deplorable than the fear of death arising from infidelity. Imagine their characters whatever you please, but from the moment they cease to expect a future state, they must inevitably regard death with horror, because they no longer view it as an entrance into the kingdom of God, and everlasting happiness, but as a total annihilation of their soul and body, and consequently as a privation of all good, and the greatest of all evils.

In the *Wisdom of Solomon* we find this remarkable expression concerning the death of the righteous: *in the sight of the unwise they seemed to die; and their departure is taken for misery; and their going from us to be utter destruction.* Remark the expression: *in the sight of the unwise they seemed to die:* for considering death according to the idea of the infidel, they are not actually dead. The unbeliever imagines death, which is but a departure from this world, and an arrival at that blessed country to which we are travelling, as the total ruin of man.

It is evident, and the libertine himself is forced to acknowledge, that no condition is more miserable than that of the sceptic; for what torment must he endure from this reflection, perpetually arising in his mind? I shall in a short time cease to exist, or begin to exist in eternal suffering; I know not which will be my fate. My present life consists of a few days that are rapidly passing away; after which I expect nothing but annihilation, or infinite and inevitable misery!

Men alone, those I mean who are destitute of religion, are subject to these agonizing thoughts. The angels, knowing their natural incorruptibility, have no fear nor expectation of death. The brutes are subject to death, but they are unacquainted with their own nature, and incapable of reflection,

therefore have no apprehension of dying. Good men, whose bodies are mortal like those of the brute creation, resemble the angels in the knowledge of their destination, and support their minds by the hope of immortal life: but the libertine has neither of these advantages; he must die, and he is not ignorant of his fate; he possesses an immortal soul, and he knows not its immortality: the certainty of death afflicts him, whilst his ignorance of future existence deprives him of all consolation: reason and self-knowledge serve but to involve his mind in grief and despair. Such is the state into which men fall in consequence of their impiety, a just punishment inflicted by God, who thus causes their iniquity to become a source of torment, and, instead of the gratification they sought, to fill their minds with a crowd of painful ideas, which give them an anticipation of the most grievous sufferings of hell.

But the sinner, you will say, who is hardened in guilt, who is sunk in the depths of iniquity, no longer dreads the approach of death, since he has learned to disbelieve all future existence.—He might possibly rest in this false and criminal peace, if his mind were settled in error; if the impiety which leads him to doubt all religious truth, could establish him in the belief of any opposite system. Yet he would still fear to die, from his attachment to life, the loss of which he

would continually apprehend, without looking forward to any thing in futurity which could afford him happiness: but this, my brethren, is not the extent of his misery; his belief in that annihilation which he imagines the consequence of death, being combatted by innumerable doubts and contradictory opinions, living as he does, in constant uncertainty, and notwithstanding his infidelity, incurring the hazard of a dreadful eternity, he must necessarily fear even that he does not believe; and the apprehension he feels is, in some respects, more tremendous, than if it arose from a firm conviction of the judgment of God.

But admitting, christians, that his impiety renders him insensible to these considerations, and reduces him to a level with the brutes, whose fate he probably envies, and whom he would willingly resemble, *for man that is in honour, and understandeth not, is like the beasts that perish;* yet we should examine whether this insensibility is suitable to his nature, and whether ignorance of his great and impending danger makes him less worthy of compassion, than the pain arising from well-founded apprehension. His danger is such as he cannot himself deny, nor does he profess to think it obviated by his insensibility. It is certain, however, that whilst he retains any portion of feeling, he will fear, though he may not absolutely believe the consequences of death; and I am con-

vinced that feeling will never be extinguished whilst understanding remains. In the greatest excesses of passion, and even in the greatest perversion of the understanding, the libertine will ever feel a worm within; these tormenting thoughts will perpetually present themselves to his mind: —If I should be in a delusion; if that death which destroys the body should be followed by a second death, by the agony of the soul; if that should be true which good and wise men, who are believers in christianity, assert; if the passion by which I am swayed should have blinded and seduced me, what will be the result?—These reflections will occasion him disquietude in every period of life, but their impression will be much more vivid on the approach of death: that is the period when the boldest, the most determined wickedness begins to tremble and doubt; then we see those courageous, those intrepid men, who have never feared death, or hell; who, during the vigour of constant health, imagined themselves powerful enough to disregard the Almighty and his judgments, evincing the most pitiable weakness, yielding to terror and despair; viewing the past with detestation, the present with alarm, and the future with horror.

Ah! my brethren, what consolation is offered to us, in those admirable of St. Paul, to the Thessalonians, words which should be eternally engraven on our hearts: *But I would not have you to be*

ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. Attend to the Apostle's meaning: he does not forbid us to fear death; not to be afflicted at the death of our friends; but he forbids us to fear, and to grieve, like them who, being destitute of religion, have no hope of eternal happiness, because their fear and their sorrow proceeding from infidelity, are highly criminal in the sight of God. The fear of death is not in itself sinful, but it is sinful when it arises from motives that are inconsistent with our faith. Yet how prevalent is this fault amongst mankind. We find many who fear death, not as christians, but as pagans; they are professedly christians, but their christianity consisting in profession only, they regard a future state like men of the world, and from their reasonings you might suppose them disciples of Epicurus.

Do you inquire how we may preserve ourselves from this unhappy, this culpable state of mind? I refer you to one of the most illustrious models exhibited in the sacred writings: we must, in the expectation of death, aspire after that disposition in which we behold the patriarch Job, when overwhelmed with sufferings and calamities that brought him almost to the grave; when in the lively exercise of that faith and hope, which sustained his patience and fortitude, he exclaimed,—*I know*

that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God. I know that I have a Redeemer living in the heavens; I know that I shall rise from the tomb, and that mine eyes will behold my God. I know that death is but a change of state; that it will divest me of all, but to enrich me again; that it will deprive me of a frail existence, to put me in possession of immortality. Of these things I have an assured conviction, and this precious hope which God has given me as an earnest of future happiness, consoles me in affliction, strengthens me in weakness, attaches me to duty, renders me invincible in the midst of temptation, and enables me successfully to withstand the violence of persecution. Without such consolation, my strength would fail on numberless occasions, and I should yield to the feelings of nature; but this hope is my constant support, therefore I cherish it in my heart.

Thou hast sore broken us in the place of dragons, and covered us with the shadow of death; said the royal Psalmist. Thou hast humbled us Lord, in this abode of affliction and tears, by subjecting us to death: but that death to which we are condemned is but a *shadow*, which thou hast cast over us, to make us sensible of thy justice, and

at the same time to display thy mercy. The death of the body, is but a shadow and representation of death;—a reflection calculated for the encouragement not only of sinners, who from the consideration of the enormity of their sins, are unable to exercise the faith of the gospel, but even of the righteous, of the friends of God, who are frequently suffered by divine providence, to tremble at the thought of death; for how many holy men have when contemplating death, felt the same apprehensions as the impious! To how many severe trials has it pleased God to expose their faith, that his grace might prove triumphant! and how often may a christian even in his happiest moments, exclaim like David:—*But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped.* At the sight of that tremendous chaos, that fearful eternity, into which I am about to enter, I have almost turned from the path in which I was walking; *my feet had well nigh slipped;* for that faith which alone invigorates the mind became feeble and wavering! How many of the elect have held this language? It is then needful for christians carefully to guard their minds, against that spirit of infidelity, which would prove to them, *a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence.*

Having thus considered the fear of death, which troubles the mind of the infidel, let us proceed, secondly, to consider the state of the worldling, who

fears death in consequence of his attachment to earthly enjoyments: another species of fear which we ought to avoid.

PART II.

II. We are too well convinced, christians, by our own experience, and by that of others, that to a man of the world, whose happiness consists in the enjoyment of temporal blessings, nothing is more melancholy than the thought of death.—*Death, how bitter is the remembrance of thee to a man that liveth at rest in his possessions.* It is not to every man who has worldly possessions, that the idea of death is mournful and afflicting, but to him whose enjoyment, whose felicity depends on them: they who are actuated by the spirit of God, consider them merely accidental pleasures, with which they can easily dispense. To day these pleasures may be enjoyed, and to morrow taken away, and although the loss may occasion some slight uneasiness, it will not shake the firmness of mind inspired by true piety: but men of the world derive all their happiness from worldly possessions, estimating themselves according to those possessions, and relying on them alone; as if they had been made for their wealth, instead of their wealth having been made for them. This disposition, and not the mere

possession of grandeur and affluence, makes death appear tremendous; for we have seen some christians, great and affluent, yet enabled by the powerful influence of real christianity to reflect on death with pleasure, to hear it spoken of with joy, and to view its immediate approach without anxiety; because, in the midst of their enjoyments, grandeur and affluence were not the sources of their happiness; they possessed them without immoderate attachment, and relinquished them without regret: but we have never seen the great or affluent, whose felicity arose from grandeur or riches, nor even the abject and poor who were attached to enjoyments their situation could not supply, who were capable of viewing death without terror. In fact, my brethren, to a man of the world who lives in comfort, who is well established in life, who is invested with honours, who is in want of nothing that contributes to splendor; whose wealth, reputation, and influence, enable him to obtain every wish, and to overcome every obstacle; what a strange, what an overwhelming thought, in the midst of all these enjoyments is the certainty of death. Let us not, however, confine the moral utility of our remarks by regarding only those possessors of worldly enjoyments, whose greatness and opulence is so unbounded: let us consider them whose rank is less splendid and less remarkable. To a man in common life, whose family is provided with every thing essential to a

moderate station, who enjoys a fortune adequate to all his wants, who is free from care and anxiety, and whose age is such as to allow all the pleasure of perfect health and vigour, how gloomy, how terrific, is the apprehension of death!

The worldling in these circumstances, appears to me an object of compassion, not only because he fears death from an immoderate attachment to the blessings of this life, but because, convinced of the certainty of death, he has blindly set his affections on these transitory enjoyments, and remains invariably attached to them. Were the present life to last for ever, I should not be astonished to find the ambitious, and the avaricious, subject to the influence of their unruly passions. However vain and frivolous those passions in the present state of things, they might then in some degree be the offspring of reflection and prudence. Exempt from the fear of dying, we should then act wisely in procuring the gratification of our desires; for we should be authorised in regarding the allurements of the world as real advantages, and reason itself would co-operate with our predominant wishes. I will go still further: were our lives protracted to the same period as those of the first patriarchs, the founders of the world, who, as we learn from scripture were, after they had existed whole ages, still in the prime of life, and who beheld a long succession of generations without

suffering the infirmities of advanced age, we might perhaps be justifiable in feeling some eagerness in the pursuit of temporal enjoyments; the length of their duration would be our excuse; although it would even then become us to moderate our anxieties, and repress our inordinate desires, by the consideration of death, which, however distant, being certain and inevitable, would at length snatch from us our dearest pleasures. For this reason, it has been remarked, that Moses, in the genealogy of the patriarchs, from Adam to Noah, after he had computed the years which each one had lived, added these words, *and he died. All the days that Adam lived, were nine hundred and thirty years: and he died. And all the days of Seth were nine hundred and twelve years, and he died;* and so of the rest. Why does the inspired writer expressly inform us *they died?* Was not their death implied in the specification of the years they had lived? It was, but he meant to impress us with the idea that if it were possible for us to live thousands of ages, we should still be blameable for seeking transient enjoyments with avidity, since it would at some period of time be said of us, *and he died.* This consideration alone should correct the excess of our affections, and moderate our attachments. The supposition of a life including many centuries would, it is true, afford some pretext, some apology, for our earthly affections: but our existence being limited to so short a

space, and our hearts so rivetted to this transitory existence and its momentary pleasures,—alas! my brethren, are we rational; are we justifiable, I will not say in the sight of God, but even in our own eyes, and at the tribunal of our own conscience? Does not our conduct appear as if we were under some strange infatuation? *Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?* These words were addressed to the rich man, when anticipating a long and undisturbed enjoyment of the fruit of his labours. Observe the appellation which our Saviour gives to him whose heart is fixed on earthly happiness. He does not expressly reproach him with weakness, temerity, and irreligion, but with folly; for that reproach includes all the rest. To be subject to death, yet so obstinately resolved on the attainment of worldly prosperity, as to render it the sole object of our pursuit, is the height of folly and madness.

You ought not then to be surprised, or offended, if I address you in similar language; if, wise and prudent as you may be according to the maxims of the world, I say, *thou fool*, why this excessive attention to your body, which will soon be the food of worms? Why those vast designs which death will shortly terminate? Why that vehement desire to aggrandize yourselves and extend

your possessions, since after a few more days are past, six feet of earth will be all you need? When inordinate desires arise in your minds, and, overcoming your reason, intoxicate you with worldly pleasures, how, my brethren, does St. Paul teach you to suppress those desires? By reflecting that we have here no *continuing city*, that whilst we remain in this mortal body we are far from our own country, and should regard ourselves as travellers to a *better country*. Now what should we think of a traveller whom we saw taking a lively interest in every thing that happened on his journey, and giving way to anger, disquietude and grief on every trivial occasion? This, however, is a representation of our characters; and the disposition we indulge is the origin of that immoderate fear of death which renders our condition so pitiable; for the fear of death, arising from an uncontroulable desire of false and apparent good, is an illusion which, according to the dispensations of providence, we may justly consider a punishment. Whilst the Apostle was in this world, this state of exile, he ardently wished to terminate his course: finding nothing here to arrest his attention, and having a mind disengaged from all transient and temporal pleasures, he exclaims, *O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?* But we, christians, are grieved at the view of death: the infirmities and diseases which foretell its approach,

fill our hearts with gloomy apprehensions, and occasion the most poignant anguish; the truth is, we are unwilling to be deprived of those enjoyments we now possess, and must relinquish at death.

What a spectacle, my dear hearers, is a rich worldling struggling with death, and endeavouring, to the last moment, to ward off the fatal stroke! Death hurries him from those delightful and magnificent abodes, the work of his hands, or to speak more correctly, the production of his vanity and luxuriousness, in which he is desirous of dwelling for ever. His heart still cherishes feelings which gave existence its greatest charm, and death with unrelenting hand, tears him from his happiness. He is still forming projects for the augmentation of his wealth, projects which he is on the point of carrying into execution, and, in one moment, death totally overthrows them! What is it that harrows up his soul? It is this departure from the world, this separation, this sudden and general overthrow. Alas! my brother, I tremble for you, when I find that your trouble at the thought of death arises from those passions which have produced all the irregularities of your life. If you feared death from any other of those various reasons which excite apprehension in the breast of a sinner, I should regard you with hope, and endeavour to render your fear beneficial. If

your apprehension of death made you labour to overcome those passions, and break off those habits which attach you to the present life, I should congratulate you; and bless the Almighty for your reformation; but if you are still wholly devoted to those things which have corrupted your mind, and which menace your destruction, your situation, I repeat, is most melancholy and awful.

What do we learn from these reflections? We learn, my brethren, to *die daily*, to prepare ourselves for death, that we may no longer dread its approach; to turn our eyes from the fleeting pageantry of this world, that we may behold it pass away without violent emotion, or deep regret; to detach our hearts and withhold our affections from all that we must one day relinquish!

But, you may reply, we shall always fear death from a sentiment implanted in our nature. This leads me to speak, thirdly, of them whose apprehension arises from a natural feeling, and who neglect to fortify their minds by religious considerations.

PART III.

III. I know my dear hearers, that nature has in every age implanted in the heart of man the fear of death; nor are even sages and christians

exempt from that fear; but I know likewise, that in every age wise men have been able to correct this weakness by natural reflection, and to repel by their own reason, the arguments suggested by the involuntary timidity they were labouring to overcome. Are we not then in a pitiable state if we do not accomplish by the light of christianity, and with the assistance of divine grace, what they were enabled to perform merely by the light of nature; if we derive less energy from true religion, than philosophers felt in the midst of idolatry and superstition?

I cannot without astonishment reflect on the admirable sentiments entertained by pagans on the subject of death, and the noble efforts of magnanimity and constancy by which their sentiments were exemplified. It is ridiculous, said they, to fear death, having already died so many times, and being continually in the act of dying.—What is meant by the expression, *having already died so many times?* It implies that all the years which we have lived, and which will never return, are so many portions taken from our lives, and so many deaths through which we have passed. They were surprised that men should so long fear that which lasts so short a space; that death, which occupies an almost imperceptible point of time, should disturb the tranquillity of our minds.– They asserted that we ought not to complain of death,

since death was just to all men, giving them satisfaction for the injuries they had received:—That those disgusting inequalities of fortune, those unmerited tokens of favour, that humiliation of the virtuous and deserving, and aggrandizement of the unworthy, in a word, all those iniquities which irritate our feelings and excite our indignation, are terminated by death, and by death only; and that this hope is one of the most powerful supports under all the afflictions of life. — They shewed that death, to which all men are alike subject, was the remedy of many, the desire and happiness of some; and that by no one ought it to be received with more pleasure, than by the man to whom it came, before he was reduced to the necessity of desiring its approach.*—On this point they argued justly; for he who considers all the miseries from which we are delivered by death, and all the infirmities and sufferings that accompany extreme old age, will readily acknowledge, that the shortness of life is one of the blessings for which we ought to be grateful to divine providence.

* *Nos mortem ridiculè timemus toties jam mortui et morientes.—Quomodò quod tam citò fit, timetur diu.—Quid mortem quereris? Mors sola jus æquum generis humani?—Mors omnibus finis, multis remedium quibusdam votum, de nullis melius emerita quàm de his ad quos veni antequàm invocetur.* SENECA.

Sometimes they represented death as a happy release from a melancholy captivity; sometimes as a return from a state of exile; sometimes as an exemption from the labours of military service; sometimes as a prompt and perfect remedy for every suffering. If, christians, you imagine their opinions on this subject were but speculative, and their language ostentatious, which did not prevent the heathen philosophers from fearing and avoiding death, you are mistaken: their reasonings were so influential as not unfrequently to carry them to excess, since many of them put an end to their own existence, and gloried in suicide as the height of virtue: however gross this error, we ought to be covered with confusion on reflecting, that pagans had sufficient strength of mind to regard with complacency, and to seek death, whilst we who are christians, cannot behold it without terror.

The religion we profess supplies us with more powerful arguments for divesting death of its terrors, and enabling us to view it with firmness and tranquillity. All the sentiments I have quoted from the writings of heathens were the productions of mere human reason, arguments in which their pride took delight: but from christianity we derive the most important, the most unanswerable reasons; reasons the most capable of enlightening our understandings, and filling our hearts with

emotions of pious joy at the thought of death. —The contemplation of our dying Saviour; the expectation of the kingdom of God; the example of all the righteous; the infinite treasures of grace with which death may be enriched!—If we are insensible to motives so powerful, by what can we be impressed?

First. The contemplation of our dying Saviour; of Jesus Christ who, though immortal in his nature, became, as we are taught by St. Paul, a partaker of flesh and blood, for the purpose of subjecting himself to mortality, and thereby removing the bitterness of death: *that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man, and deliver them who, through fear of death, were all their life time subject to bondage.* Yet to you, feeble and timid christian, death still appears full of bitterness. Jesus Christ tasted death for you; and you, although you have the benefit of his example, think it hard to taste it for him. After all his care to sweeten the cup, you reject it, as if it were filled with wormwood and gall. It was the felicity of the Apostle Paul to behold death destroyed, *swallowed up* in the triumph of Jesus Christ. *Death is swallowed up in victory!* He defies death in the language of insult; without presumption, he exults,—*O! death, where is thy sting! O! grave, where is thy victory!* But we are not animated by the Apostle's

language, we share not his joy and triumph; death is still victorious over our weakness; in our apprehension it retains the same power, the same sting, so that the efficacy of the cross, and of the death of the Redeemer, appears to us almost destroyed. It is the peculiar privilege of christians, who are united to their Saviour, with well-founded assurance, to die without feeling the sting of death; but we renounce this privilege, and from a pusillanimity unworthy of our faith, not only feel, but anticipate, and give additional sharpness to that sting.

Another motive proposed by our religion is, the expectation of the kingdom of God; of that heaven into which we cannot enter till we have passed *through the valley of the shadow of death*, since God himself has said, *there shall no man see me, and live.* Is it not astonishing, that amongst the petitions we offer up to the Almighty, one of the first and most important should be, *thy kingdom come*, and at the same time, in direct opposition to this prayer, we are earnestly desirous of retarding its arrival? Is it not strange that we should dread, as our sovereign evil, that which we ought to anticipate as our sovereign felicity? When the patriarch Jacob, in his old age, beheld his son Joseph covered with honour and glory, and possessing authority over all the land of Egypt, he was transported with joy, and cried out: *Now let me die,*

since I have seen thy face. Death appeared sweet to that venerable father, because he had for a moment seen the face of his beloved son ; but we, my brethren, for whom death procures the eternal happiness of contemplating God himself; we, to whom it reveals the glory of God, to whom it will discover that blessedness which *eye hath not seen, nor ear heared, nor the heart of man conceived;* we, who having this hope, should joyfully exclaim, Lord, I will die without murmuring, I will gladly welcome death, since it will introduce me to the enjoyment of thy divine presence ;—we, christians, who ought to experience not only firmness, but even the highest satisfaction on the view of eternity, are dismayed at the thought of death, and tremble at every thing which may hasten its approach.

We are furnished with another motive, against the fear of death, by the example of all the righteous. Have not we the same aids to fortify our minds as the servants of God who have preceded us; and why is our language so dissimilar, and even so opposite to theirs ? Listen to the words of David: *I am a stranger in the earth.—My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?* My exile is long; when will it be finished! Happy moment when I shall appear before my God ! These were the genuine feelings of the royal Psalmist, under the

old testament dispentation ; and how many of the saints do we find in the new testament expressing similar feelings ? But our sentiments are far different; we find our exile too short ; we wish to make this world our country, and to inhabit it for ever; we bitterly lament the necessity of leaving it, and offer our earnest prayers for the retarding of our departure.

Lastly : let us reflect on the treasures of grace with which death may be enriched. Death affords us an opportunity of practising the most eminent virtues. By a cheerful resignation of our lives, we evince the most disinterested submission, the most perfect obedience to the will of God. By meeting death with that holy temper in which our Saviour died, we become participants of those superabundant graces which flow from the cross, as from an inexhaustible fountain : and who can tell with what spiritual treasures the dying christian is sometimes blest; and, even before the arrival of death, with what secret impressions, with what inward joys his heart is animated, at those seasons of fervent meditation, in which he anticipates his dying hour, and presents himself as a sacrifice ready to be offered up to the Almighty ! How is it then, my brethren, that the source of so many virtues, and of such extraordinary blessings is become the object

of our aversion? There is but one motive which, consistently with the doctrines of our religion, can in any measure excuse our immoderate fear of death, and that is, an apprehension of the judgment of God. With a few reflections on this part of the subject, I shall conclude my discourse.

Death is the forerunner of an eternity of happiness or misery; death will bring us into the presence of our sovereign Judge, to render a strict account of all the actions of our lives, and to receive the final sentence of reward or punishment. These thoughts my christian hearers, these fundamental points of our religion, frequently reviewed, and strongly impressed on our minds, are sufficient I acknowledge, to make us tremble with apprehension: but after all, it is certain, that if we live under the predominating influence of the fear of death; of a fear unmixed with consolation, and destitute of those hopes which, even in the breast of a sinner, under the christian dispensation, ought not to be totally banished, notwithstanding the apparent sanctity with which that fear invests our character, we are deserving of compassion. The principles of our faith point out in death itself, that which serves as a resource against the fearful judgment of God; and our state is pitiable, because we remain ignorant of this fact, and listen partially to the instructions of religion, instead of

regulating the effects of its awful truths by those of a consolatory nature.

We find an admirable reflection on this subject in the writings of one of the fathers. " We ought to contemplate death, with sentiments somewhat similar to those with which we contemplate the Almighty, who represents himself as at once amiable and dreadful : amiable, because he is a God of mercy and kindness : dreadful, becausehe is a God of justice, and, according to the scriptural expression, *a consuming fire :* in his awful character he claims our fear; in his amiable character he claims our love. In like manner death has two characters ; in one it is tremendous, in the other desirable : it is tremendous because it may be the commencement of eternal misery ; desirable, because it is ordained by God to put us in possession of immortality and glory. It is then right that we should fear and love it at the same time ; that is to say, that our fear should be tempered with love, and our love mingled with fear : and as God," adds the same writer, " who is both amiable and dreadful, requires us to regard him with sentiments in which affection is predominant, so ought we, by faith, to view death with greater desire than apprehension."

I do not deny that the righteous have feared death, or rather the consequences of death : for St. Paul, who expressed so ardent a wish for the dissolution of the body in which he was imprisoned, yet acknowledged that it was *a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.* But notwithstanding the apparent fluctuation of his mind, between love and fear,the desire of death prevailed, from the consideration that death was the way which led to God. *We are confident and willing rather to be absent from the body, and present with the Lord. Having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ.* Hence good men, however impressed with an awful sense of divine judgment, eagerly wish for the termination of this mortal life. We read of one who addressed death in the following language: " Come, thou in whom my soul delighteth; lead me to the only treasure of my heart, and shew me where he dwells, for thou alone canst bring me to his presence. Thou art environed with darkness, yet to me thou art desirable, for through that darkness I shall be led to eternal light. *Thou art terrible to the kings of the earth,* and to the worldly minded whose hopes are centered in this life; but thou art dear to me, because the world has little in which I take delight."— Thus, my brethren, ought we to fear death, or rather, we ought thus to wish for its arrival.

But you fear death because you are a sinner, because you are living in enmity against God ; you fear it because your frailty renders you continually liable to the loss of the divine favour ; you fear it because you are exposed to the dangers and temptations of the world; you fear it because, whatever virtuous actions you may perform, you are still uncertain of your state;—reasons which on the principles of the gospel, appear to be the most substantial which can be offered for indulging the fear of death : yet I maintain that, even in the circumstances of which you complain, if you enter into the nature of christianity, and are desirous of acting according to its dictates, you are authorised to regard death with complacency ; for by it you are supplied with abundant sources of hope and confidence, to moderate excessive fear. Thus I argue : I am a sinner ; this is precisely the reason why I ought habitually to contemplate death, since this contemplation is the surest mean of preserving me from sin, and strengthening me against temptation. I ought to regard the knowledge of death, not only as a motive to holiness, but as one of the strongest motives with which the Almighty has inspired me; as an effect of his boundless mercy, as a powerful and almost infallible remedy, with which his goodness has provided me. Ah ! my God, what should I be if deprived of the anticipation of death, that affecting motive which moderates my feelings,and regulates my life! into what

irregularities should I be hurried by the violence of passion! If any motive can change the heart of a sinner, and extricate him from the fearful state into which he is fallen, it is a just and serious view of death. The recollection of death, or, more properly speaking, the state of feelings produced by that recollection, has in every period of christianity, been the most effectual mean of conversion. It is the strong impression produced by the thought of death, which has abased the haughtiest souls, which has subdued the hardest and most inflexible hearts, which has brought the most determined sinners to a spirit of contrition. If the thought of death be thus efficacious, why should it not also correct *my* errors, and bring *me* back to God? Why should I not willingly mediate on death, and derive from it the greatest advantage?

I am frail, and in danger of losing the favour of God. What do I infer from this consideration? That I should perpetually have death in view, that I may thereby find a support for my weakness, and since that alone can afford me safety and assurance whilst subject to the frailties of this mortal state. I am then inimical to my own salvation and happiness if I shrink from the thought of death, as a subject of regret and dejection.

I am exposed to numberless dangers, and the evil examples with which I am surrounded in the world are so many stumbling blocks in my path; but I am enabled, by the prospect of death, to avoid those dangers, and to save myself from that deluge of wickedness which inundates the earth. Whether I consider the honour of God, or whether I regard my own interest, in either case the contemplation of death is a benefit. It will appear a benefit if I consider the honour of God, because I am thereby preserved from sinning against him: it is equally beneficial, if I regard my own interest, because the world is no longer capable of corrupting me. Solomon teaches us that the righteous man has frequently been taken out of the world in early youth, that he might not be infected by the wickedness of the age: *speedily was he taken away, lest that wickedness should alter his understanding, or deceit beguile his soul.*

But my brethren, are we still uncertain whether we are objects of the divine favour, or whether we are reprobates? Let this uncertainty lead us to implore the help of divine grace. Amidst the doubts to which we are subject, may the consideration of our mortality compel us to use the most strenuous endeavours to retain the favour of God. In a word, we are either sinners or righteous persons; if we are sinners, the thought of death restores us to the ways of God; if we are

righteous, it confirms us in those ways. If we are sinful, the thought of death leads us to repentance; if holy, it insures our perseverance.

With these views, we shall proceed calmly and securely; we shall fear death without weakness, and desire it without presumption; we shall bless the Almighty even in the display of his justice, and derive from the thought of our mortality, incentives to holiness in this world, and thus attain to everlasting happiness in the world to come.

SERMON X.

ON THE PRAYER OF JESUS CHRIST IN THE GARDEN.

MATTHEW, xxvi, 39.

And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.

THE sufferings of our Saviour are a subject of constant and devout meditation to true christians, and which produces in them all the glorious fruits of faith and holiness. Let us this day, my dear hearers, study that divine philosophy, the knowledge of *Jesus Christ and him crucified;* let us fix our thoughts on the transcendant, the sublime science of our Saviour's love, and his agonizing death.

Our text presents to us Jesus Christ praying in the garden of Gethsemane, and accepting with unreserved submission, the cup which his father had prepared for him. *Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.* Let us consider his conduct, and learn how we ought in all things to obey the commands of God, and resign ourselves to his

adorable will: let us learn that submission which should invariably actuate the christian; that submission which is indispensable to salvation, but which of all the virtues, is perhaps least known, and least practised amongst the professors of christianity.

The submission taught by the example of our divine master, who for our sakes was, as it were annihilated, who *became obedient even unto death*, consists in *sentiment*, and in *action*; in heartfelt acquiesence with the will of God, and in actual performance of the will of God. These are the two points to which I request your attention.

PART I.

I. To comprehend what is meant by a perfect resignation to the will of our Creator, and that submission of heart which consists in *sentiment*, we have only to contemplate the Son of God, prostrating himself before his father, and addressing him in the humble prayer recorded by the evangelists. By contemplating our Saviour on that occasion, we may form the highest idea of an holy acquiescence in all the decrees of heaven, in all the dispensations of divine providence; we learn that our compliance with the will of God ought to be so unlimited, and our dependence on him so entire, as to enable us, in the most trying circum-

stances, to subject our will, and repress the most natural and violent struggles of the soul. This, my dear hearers, is one of the most important points of christianity, and replete with the most salutary instruction.

How do we find our adorable Saviour employed in the garden of Gethsemane, when the hour was approaching in which he was to consummate the work of our redemption, by a death equally painful and ignominious? We find him addressing the Almighty, not in a single prayer, but in a prayer thrice repeated; not merely for the space of a few moments, but during three whole hours: and in this reiterated, this protracted prayer, what is his request? One thing alone he implores; one thing, which is the object of his most ardent wishes; for which he descended upon earth; which he sought throughout his mortal life; which he sought even with his dying breath. He prayed, O! my God, all-powerful, all-wise, all-just, all-holy Father, may thy will, and not my own, be done: *Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.* Reflect, christians, on this resignation of the only Son of God to the will of his Father; his resignation even in the bitterest grief, when a deluge of afflictions had overwhelmed his soul; his resignation when his Father, whom he glorified by that resignation, had withdrawn his sensible presence, and apparently abandoned him;

his resignation when he received no consolation from human beings; that resignation, in short, which led him to comply with the divine will without limitation or reserve. Let us, my brethren, proceed to further particulars, that we may the more fully comprehend the nature of a submission, so generous, so heroic.

The Son of God submits to the will of his Father; for it was his Father's will that he should suffer, that he should die, and by his sufferings and death procure the salvation of man: to this he submits notwithstanding the repugnance arising from the feelings of nature: in vain does nature revolt; in vain does nature compel him to say, *Let this cup pass from me:* grace makes a powerful effort, and becomes triumphant: his recollection is prompt; without inforcing the petition which had been, as it were, extorted from him by the senses, he immediately returns to the grand object which he had kept in view as the rule of his life,—to desire that only which was consistent with what heaven had resolved, and which it had determined by its immutable decrees: *Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.* At what a time is this resignation evinced: he was resigned, and in what circumstances? Ah! christians, can we immagine a season of greater sadness and desolation? All the passions of the soul rise up against him; he suffers by turns the extreme of grief, fear, and oppression:

he began to be sorrowful : he began to be sore amazed, and to be very heavy. So great was his agony and corporeal weakness, that the blood flowed from every part of his body, and bedewed the earth: *and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.* He appears totally abandoned both by God and man : he invokes his Father, and his Father answers him not. The three Apostles by whom he is accompanied fall asleep, and leave him unsustained, amidst the darkness of night, and the dreariness of solitude : he submits to the will of God, whilst utterly destitute of consolation : if he continues to pray, he is not actuated by the hope of relief from his sufferings, but of renewed strength to support those sufferings ; and we find that the only office of the angel sent from heaven, was to increase his fortitude : *there appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him.* We are not told by the Evangelist that he consoled, but merely that he strengthened him. Lastly, he submits not only to the substance of the divine will, but to all the circumstances connected with it, and the manner in which it is to be fulfilled; not only to the cross, but to all the ignominy peculiar to the cross; therefore he says not merely, what thou wilt shall be done, because it is thy will, but it shall be done in the manner thou shalt prescribe : *not as I will, but as thou wilt.*

Such, my dear hearers, is the true model of christian resignation: such the conformity of sentiment and heart which unites us to God, whatever his decrees may be, in whatever situation he sees fit to place us. To be equally resigned in adversity and in prosperity, in the tumult of passion, and in tranquillity of mind; to be resigned when the Almighty seems to treat us with the utmost rigour; when he is unmindful of our lot, or rather, when he acts as if unmindful of us, as if he had altogether forgotten us; to be resigned without the hope of alleviation and support from the world, from our family, from our acquaintance and friends, and even without the hope of any sensible influence of grace to render the cup less bitter; to be resigned, and to have no other asylum than the house of God, and the closet; to approach God, not to implore exemption from our sorrows, but strength to bear them with unshaken fidelity and perfect acquiescence; to be fully resigned to the whole will of God, and to the appointed way of performing his will;—this, my brethren, is genuine submission of mind and will to the decrees of heaven: if we fail in any one of these instances, we fall short of that resignation taught by the example of our Saviour; we neglect, or accomplish imperfectly, the duties of the religion we profess.

Does it require the virtue of a christian, or even a pagan philosopher, to comply with the will of God, when my desire meets with no opposition; when I am placed in a situation that is perfectly agreeable, and my happiness is unabated by any painful occurrence? In that happy situation I am still required, it is true, to submit to the will of God; but the submission I then evince is of a nature to be suspected; and therefore mistrustful of my own sincerity, I ought in this manner to address the Almighty :—My will, O God, is now in conformity to thine, yet since thy will requires nothing inconsistent with my own desires, I can place no dependence on a resignation so easy and so delightful; for thou art rather complying with my wishes than exacting obedience to thine own will. Lord, thy compassion, thine indulgence is great! *Search me and try me.* If it be needful, to shew whether my submission is unfeigned and worthy of the christian, cause me to pass through the *furnace of affliction: try my reins and my heart:* then shall I know, with certainty, whether my resignation is not the effect of self-love; whether I am not accepting, without reluctance, what thou hast appointed for me, only because it confers worldly advantage, only because it is honourable and agreeable. Without the test of affliction, I dare not affirm that my heart is sincere.

In like manner, christians, if I am submissive to the hand of God, only whilst my passions are unmoved, whilst my soul is in perfect tranquillity, whilst I am free from temptations to murmur and resist, what sacrifice do I make, and of what value is my submission in the sight of God? I have no enemy to conquer, no victory to obtain, no impulse to obey but that of nature. At such a time it is not difficult to exclaim with fervent devotion, *thy will be done*, O God! But to tear myself from the feelings of nature; in the tumult of passion, when all the powers of my soul are in agitation and disorder, when reason itself seems shaken, when all my knowledge and all my reflection serves but to increase my discontent and irritation;—in this tempest of the mind, the involuntary rising of the heart, to renounce myself, and to resign my will to God in the language of my Saviour, *not as I will, but as thou wilt*: — Lord! I solicit not the gratification of my own desires; I solicit not even that which in my eyes is most reasonable, most just, most holy; I am satisfied with the reverse because it is thy decree:—to maintain this temper firmly and habitually, distinguishes me in the sight of my God, and exalts me to his presence, because that temper glorifies him by rendering his grace triumphant over the most inward, the most fervent natural desires of my heart. Happy though in an agony like my Saviour; happy, though like him covered with blood, if I could re-

peatedly say in his words, and with a portion of his spirit: *Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.*

But possibly in the storm by which I am assailed, the Almighty will remove far from me; or to speak more justly, will act as if he were far from me; for thus he sometimes treats the sufferer; apparently forsaking him, and granting neither illumination nor comfort. Every thing is then discouraging, every thing contributes to make him feel the weight of his grief. Into what dejection he falls! What oppression overwhelms, what gloomy reflections torture his soul! Faith comes to his relief, and counsels him to approach his God: he seeks, but finds him not: he knocks at the door, but heaven seems shut against him; there appears to be no God to hear his prayer: such, at least, is the reproach of the enemies of his salvation; such the suggestion of nature and sense: *They continually say unto me where is thy God?* He meets perhaps a christian friend, a minister of the gospel, who, like the angel sent from heaven, re-animates his fortitude; but this proves merely support, not the restoration of tranquillity. In this absence of comfort, this oppression of mind, is it possible to be resigned to the will of God? Yes, my brethren, even in such a state I am able, and I am required to practise resignation; for

when I am instructed to submit to the will of God, the injunction is not applicable to the period of divine consolation, in which the Almighty fills me with the blessings of his spirit, and the abundance of his grace: at such a season, every thing is easy; *in my prosperity*, like David I confidently said, *I shall never be moved.* How often in holy communion with heaven, in the fervor of prayer, in the ecstacies of a heart affected, warmed, transported, have I protested that my will should be eternally conformed to the will of of heaven: but to evince a resignation firm, constant, solid, and estimable in the sight of God, I must acquiesce in his decrees when the light of my mind is darkened, the fervor of my heart cooled, the tears of devotional joy dried up, the inward pleasures I experienced turned into insensibility or disgust. *Thou didst hide thy face,* says the Psalmist, *and I was troubled.* This is the season of trial in which I ought to arm myself with all the power of christianity; to *wrestle* with God; to force myself, notwithstanding his apparent opposition, into his presence. My language should be, thou Lord, hast forsaken me, but I will never forsake thee: thou hast forsaken me by withdrawing that sensible presence with which thine elect are favoured; but I will never forsake thee by giving up that inviolable and essential union which thine elect preserve with thee. When thou dost seem to abandon me, I will more than ever resign myself to

thy care; and with the pure views of faith, with the same sincerity as in those days of peace and happiness in which thou deignest to communicate thyself to me, to fill my heart with joy in believing, I will still say, *nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.*

Without soliciting the vain consolations of the world, without recurring even to his dearest friends to dissipate his grief, and compensate the loss of spiritual comfort, the true christian seeks his God only; and however thorny the way in which he walks, he is satisfied if assured that it is the *right way* by which Providence is leading him *to a city of habitation.* The divine will is a motive which inspires him to submit, unreservedly, to all the divine dispensations. I cannot then be too careful to impress on my mind the important thought; —it will be insufficient, it will be altogether unayailing to submit in some instances, whilst I resist in others. I ought to regard as sacred all events which are stamped with characters of the will of God; since his will is in each of them equally venerable. What is the cup which the Son of God receives? It is that which is chosen and presented by his Father, not a cup prepared or chosen by himself: *the cup which my father hath given me, shall I not drink it?*—Were I to prescribe my own sufferings, disgraces, and mor-

tifications; and according to my taste and inclination, to accept one and reject another, in proportion as taste and inclination were consulted, I should gratify my own will; and the gratification of my own will is incompatible with sincere and genuine acquiescence in the divine will, because it is essential to such acquiescence that my own will should be annihilated within me, and swallowed up in the will of God.

We see then the erroneousness of that language, so frequently used by persons whose conduct is, in part, conformable to the precepts of christianity. I am resigned to suffering, they will say, since it is appointed by God; but I would be exempt from this or that affliction in particular: let the Almighty afflict me with infirmity or sickness, I shall submit without a murmuring word; but I cannot exist in the state of abasement in which I am placed; I cannot endure the outrage and unworthy treatment to which I am exposed. Let the Almighty deprive me of riches, he is the master of all I possess, and I resign it freely to his disposal; but the loss of a near and dear relative, of reputation, the tyranny of a fellow-mortal, the privation of my rights, the embittering of my life by the society of those, whose ill-humour, contradiction, and caprice, are incessant torments:—this is too grievous to be borne. In arguing thus, my brethren, we deceive ourselves; and we lose

our resignation by subjecting it to limits. The cup we reject is that appointed for us by divine providence, and consequently, that which is intended to exercise our submission and to make us holy. *The cup which my father hath given me.* Every other would be ineffectual, because we should not receive it from the hand of God, nor would it be that by which he is pleased to prove our submission; with which he has connected our salvation and perfection.

Perfect acquiescence in the decrees of heaven requires us to submit, unreservedly, not only to afflictions themselves, but likewise to all the circumstances attendant on them. Do we not attempt to give laws to the Almighty when we say:—from any other person I would endure this unkindness, this contempt, this refusal; but from that man I cannot brook it: at any other time, on any other occasion, I would submit in silence; but on this occasion I must utter my complaints, I must obtain satisfaction. The affliction, we acknowledge, is appointed by God; are the circumstances of person, time and occasion, less dependent on his sovereign will?

Ah! Lord, how ingenious is the heart of man in defending its interests! Jealous of its liberty, and impatient under the yoke, how artfully it justifies rebellion against thee! Too long, O! my

God, too often have I listened to the pretexts, and yielded to the impulse of a peevish, irritated and rebellious spirit; but this stubborn heart must now yield. Contemplating the example of thy Son, I am no longer permitted to cherish any other feeling than the most humble, the most intire acquiescence in thy will; an acquiescence in the saddest vicissitudes, in the most afflicting situations; an acquiescence in calamity, in want, in all the sorrows of life; an acquiescence unabated by the occasional revolts of the heart, and the frequent recurrence of strong and tumultuous passions; an acquiescence in the midst of darkness, in the midst of discouragement, desolation, and langour, when the refreshment of that heavenly dew which thou, Lord, dost sometimes cause to descend, is withheld; an acquiescence pure and spiritual, derived from nothing the world can offer to console or divert the mind; an acquiescence universal and entire, embracing all possible events, and even the minutest circumstances of each event. Such, my God, is the acquiescence which I ought to feel, and which I cannot violate without forgetting what thou art, and what I am. Such a submission is attended with numerous difficulties; and within myself finds many obstacles. All that is sensual in my heart rises up against it, and occasions a perpetual warfare: but with thy grace, O! Lord, reason and religion will overcome the flesh, or will enable me to disregard its murmurs,

and still to address thee in those words which I have often repeated, but whose spirit I now feel more powerfully than ever: *Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.* Were peace of mind my only object, I should cherish this disposition, without which it is unattainable: for thou, Lord, art the centre of my repose, therefore I cannot hope for tranquillity unless united to thee. It is the happiness of the blessed in heaven to have no will but thine; they behold, they love, they possess thee; but that vision, that love, that possession are the means of felicity, only because they are the principles of perfect conformity to thee; consequently, if any one amongst the number of the blessed were dissatisfied with the state in which thou hadst placed him, and desirous of a glory which he had not received, he would be no longer happy.

Let us therefore, my brethren, henceforward participate, by a christian resignation, in the happiness of the blessed; and acquire by choice and preparation that which they have received as their appointed recompense. This resignation consists in *sentiment*, in acquiescence of our will with the will of God; and in *practice*, in the accomplishment of all that God ordains: the latter idea I am now to illustrate.

PART II.

II. Some of our virtues are confined to the heart, and consist merely in desire, affection, and volition; others are external, and their worth consists in action. Christian conformity to the will of God, comprehends the virtues of both descriptions: it teaches us not only to love and to acquiesce in the will of God, but to act conformably to his will, and even to the manner in which it is to be accomplished. Behold an exemplification in the conduct of our divine master, and let us derive from it that instruction it so forcibly inculcates.

It had been decreed by infinite wisdom, that Jesus Christ should be delivered up to death: the Angel had just announced the immutable determination of heaven. By an effort of the greatest magnanimity, the Son of God had resigned himself to the will of his Father; but in the extreme weakness to which he was reduced by his agony and bloody sweat, was he capable of presenting himself so shortly to that cruel death, whose approach had affected him so powerfully? By the bare idea of his sufferings, he had been amazed, overwhelmed, and brought to a state of inconceivable weakness. He had more than once been forced to recur to his Apostles for support;

he had said, *tarry ye here and watch with me*, as if doubtful of his resolution, and apprehensive that he should need their presence. Was there reason then to expect that he would venture to engage in a combat for which he seemed so ill prepared; that he would dare to put himself into the hands of his enemies; that instead of fleeing when the soldiers were heard, he would advance to meet them and prevent their search? No, christians; judging according to the principles of human nature, this conduct appears highly improbable: and herein we cannot sufficiently admire the all-powerful efficacy of perfect submission, maintained by the influence of divine grace; there is nothing, however painful and repulsive, which it does not lead us to embrace; nothing, however wearisome, in which it does not enable us to persevere, untill we have done all in our power for accomplishing the will of God: for the evidence of this truth, let us still look to Jesus, our model and our guide.

What a miracle do we behold! What an astonishing change! What intrepidity in him who had appeared so timid, so subdued by mortal dread! What constancy and fortitude in him who had been dejected, amazed, and ready to sink beneath the weight of sorrow! What promptitude, what activity in him who was before oppressed, enfeebled, extended on the earth, and just

ready to expire! By what means is he thus transformed! My christian hearers, the Son of God was ever the same, ever penetrated with sentiments of resignation to the will of his Father; but that resignation remained for a time concealed in his heart, because the season of action was not arrived. His submission had been powerfully assailed, strongly combated, violently shaken; but it was still consistent, its foundation was still unmoved. When the hour is come in which he is to fulfill the command of God, then his submission is fully and powerfully displayed: then all his fears are dispelled, all his anxieties are calmed, all his repugnance vanishes; then all the powers of his soul rise with renovated strength, and no suffering is sufficient to amaze, or to restrain him. Observe him advancing towards the Apostles; listen while he speaks: he no longer enjoins them to refrain from sleep, to be watchful, and to remain near him, as if desirous of engaging them in his defence: his words are, *sleep on now, and take your rest:* intending thereby to shew that he trusted not in them, that his determination was irrevocable, that his time was appointed, and that he sought not to avoid his fate. *Behold the hour is at hand:* he no longer manifests grief, fear, and irresolution; but transported with holy fervor, in a decided and animating tone, he calls on his disciples to advance: *rise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth betray me.* The traitor is

near, and I am unwilling that he should shew more promptitude in discovering me, than I evince in presenting myself to him: the band conducted by him will soon appear, and I ought not to be less determined to abandon myself to their power, than they to deprive me of freedom. *Rise, let us be going.* He does not now quit the Apostles, and retire to the most solitary part of the garden, as if he dreaded to be perceived by his enemies: he goes forth to meet them who are in search of him; he approaches, he interrogates them; he enquires for what purpose they are come, and against whom they are sent. *Whom seek ye?* When they reply that their commission regards Jesus of Nazareth, he says without dissimulation or reserve, *I am he.* When the majesty of his countenance, and the divinity of his language inspire them with so much awe that they fall backward to the ground, he permits them to arise, again enquires whom they seek, declares that he is Jesus, and that they are at liberty to fulfill the commands they had received: *I have told you that I am he.* Although he thus resigns himself into their hands, he forbids them to act in an hostile manner towards the apostles, or to prevent their departure; because their presence is not needful, nor does he regard their assistance: *if therefore ye seek me, let these go their way.* When Peter, through excess of zeal for his master, draws his sword, and strikes the servant of the

high priest, our Saviour condemns the impetuosity of the zealous apostle, restrains his hand, and instantly performs a miracle to heal the wound which Malchus had received. He will not permit the least impediment to the work appointed for him by his Father; that is the object of all his thoughts, all his wishes, all his exertions. He requires no other motive, no other interest, no other support than the will of God; as he expressly declares in that admirable passage in the gospel of St. John: *but that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence.* Let us not hesitate or delay; (such is the spirit of his words;) I know what is prepared for me, I know to what I am called; but there is no hardship to which I am not ready to submit, no suffering however cruel, which I am not resolved to encounter, in order to convince the world that I love the Father; that all his commands to me are sacred; and to teach the world an unlimited submission to his will:—*that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do.*

My brethren, we are part of that world for whose instruction the Son of God laid down his life. It has been already shewn that the will of God requires, in various instances, only resignation of heart, free and voluntary acceptance, and pa-

tient endurance: but as we are taught by our great exemplar, that on other occasions, it excites to action; that it requires certain efforts, and demands the performance of certain duties: and when we are made acquainted with the divine will, and feel the influence of divine grace urging us to accomplish it, woe unto us if we deliberate, if we remain indolently inactive! In vain we trust in our resolutions of fidelity to God; when those resolutions cease to be effectual, they are altogether fallacious. In religion, active obedience is inseparably connected with sincere resolves: God gives us to *will* and to *do*. If then our boasted purposes are unproductive of virtuous actions, they are but imaginary purposes; and we may justly be compared to those idols spoken of by Moses, which have *feet, yet walk not, mouths, yet speak not; eyes, but see not.*

Such however, my dear hearers, is the pitiable blindness in which we find many professors of christianity. They are perpetually saying to the Almighty, *thy will be done;* and as soon as they have pronounced these words, they imagine they have performed an act of pious obedience: but what do they perform of all that God commands? In what instances are their diligence and submission apparent? How many indispensible obligations do they neglect, or partially discharge? But to profess submission to God, whilst acting in con-

tinual opposition to his will; to declare that we are resigned to the whole of his pleasure, when we scarcely ever perform that which we are assured is pleasing to him; daily to pray that all that is done in heaven and on earth, in ourselves and in others, may be conformable to his will, when we perpetually violate the rules he has prescribed, when we live in frequent, habitual, and almost universal neglect of his precepts?—what is this partial obedience but trifling with the Almighty, and making a phantom of one of the most solid and most holy virtues of christianity?

Let us then judge ourselves, my brethren, sincerely and impartially. We profess a religion whose maxims, precepts, and worship are all certain, and explicit declarations of the will of God. We are in situations, ranks and societies to which God has called us, in which he has marked out our path, and appointed our functions and employments: on numberless occasions we feel the influence of the spirit of God making known his will, soliciting and urging us to perform that which would glorify him, and sanctify and incline our hearts to co-operate in his plans of mercy and salvation. If we listen to these suggestions; if we walk in the path to which we are called, if we discharge the duties of the station assigned us with christian constancy and unremitting diligence; if we conform our actions, and the whole plan of our life

to the dictates of the gospel; if we serve the Almighty with the service he merits and requires, then let us confirm our hopes; for we may assuredly believe that we are united with him in mind and will: but without actual obedience, in vain we humble ourselves before his altar, and acknowledge him the sovereign arbiter of all things; in vain we pour out our souls, in moments of sensibility, in the most fervent and specious protestations: our effusions are mere words, our religion is a mere sentiment, which the Almighty cannot approve as real submission, when unaccompanied by the works which it ought to produce.

You will reply, that practical submission imposes great restraints; that it requires laborious and wearisome exertions, which we are sometimes unable to support; that we are not always capable of doing violence to ourselves, of acting with equal promptitude and zeal, of practising an equally strict and unlimited obedience. Ah! my dear hearers, in framing these excuses, do you think of him whose creatures you are, and on whom you are essentially dependent? Do you comprehend his greatness and his rights? Is he not your God in all circumstances and in every situation? Is not his will supreme? By what strange inversion is that sovereign will made to depend on our weakness and timidity, on our caprice and inconsistency? Shall we obey the commands of God, who is so

powerful, and so worthy to be served, only when those commands are agreeable, only when they are accomplished with ease, when they require no exertion, no subjection, no humiliation? Must the Almighty be guided by the vicissitude of our feelings? Must he await the favourable moment in which our zeal shall be re-kindled, in which our minds shall be actuated by a new impulse; as if it were right that our will should be the rule of his conduct, rather than his commands the rule of ours? No, my God! this were unjust, this were an insult to thy greatness. Why should I be more ready to obey thee at one period than at another? Art thou not at all times the God on whom I depend? Thy will is eternal, mine is instability itself: may my instability be fixed by thine eternity, and my will be rendered immutable by piety, as thine is immutable by nature. The same dominion ever imposes the same obligation, and the same master is ever entitled to the same obedience.

Christians, it is our duty to enter into ourselves, and seriously to examine our own hearts; to discover in what instances we are most deficient in the accomplishment of the will of God; most prone to violate the laws he has prescribed. Are we most defective in the exercises of piety, in prayer, in the performance of religious worship; or are we most faulty in our temporal concerns, in the occupations of our calling, in the administration of our wealth, in

domestic duties, in the education of our children? We ought likewise to enquire what are the events, the casualties of life, the misfortunes, which lead us most frequently to sorrow and repine. Are they the maladies with which God afflicts us? Are they the acts of injustice, and the persecutions of our fellow creatures? Are they the losses we sustain in commerce? Are they the expressions of contempt, and the mortifications to which we are exposed? Are they the labours and fatigues with which we are burthened, or which we imagine burthensome? Let us recollect ourselves in the presence of God my brethren: we may by proper attention discover the object which most frequently agitates our hearts, and which gives us the most pain. Let us not rest satisfied with knowing our danger, but let us prepare ourselves to encounter it. Whenever we are called to exertion, whenever we are obliged to bear the weight of suffering, whenever we are required to renounce and subdue ourselves, let us imagine that, like the three disciples, we are led on by Jesus Christ, who is exhorting us in these words: *Rise, let us be going: behold, the hour is at hand!* Hasten, christians; delay not an instant: behold the hour in which your Saviour calleth, and in which it is your duty to follow him. On this occasion, in this service you are enabled to give certain proof of your love, your fidelity, your obedience. Beware, lest you

act with negligence, sullenness, or instability; beware, lest you recede, or remain supinely inactive: *Rise, let us be going.* Consider the greatness of him who enjoins these efforts ; consider the glory they will confer on his name, and the reward they will procure for yourselves; consider that God is the spectator and judge of your actions; consider that on your entire submission in the present instance, is the evidence of your sanctification, your predestination, and salvation ; and that the want of this submission will deprive you of the choicest gifts of his grace, of his special and abundant blessings : *Rise, let us be going.* Let us imagine, I repeat, that our Saviour himself is thus presuading and encouraging us. If we are true christians these motives will be all-powerful. More than ever resigned to the will of our heavenly Father, and more resolved to fulfill his commands, we shall then say with eagerness, like the Apostle Paul : *Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?* Make known thy will; whatever it be, I am resigned, my heart is prepared, my hands are ready for the work. To confirm our obedience, my brethren, we shall recur to the example of the Son of God, saying, whilst we are striving to vanquish ourselves and surrounding temptations; *that the world may know that I love the Father ; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do.* Hitherto, my God, my love for thee has scarcely been apparent to the world, and scarcely evident to myself: but I am

now called to make it known for the edification of others, and for my own consolation; for never can I obtain, nor give to the world a more convincing proof that I love thee sincerely, and unreservedly, than when I find myself in *sentiment* and *practice* transformed into thy likeness, by an inviolable and entire conformity to thy will. My efforts to resemble thee, will not be in vain; and my conformity to thee, will be the surest title to a reception into thy kingdom, and a participation of thy glory.

SERMON XI.

ON THE LAST JUDGMENT.

[Preached before Lewis XIV.]

Luke, xxi. 27.

And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud, with power and great glory.

It is remarkable, says an ancient writer, that the attribute of majesty is never ascribed in the gospel to Jesus Christ, but in reference to the general judgment at which he is to preside; and that our Saviour who on so many accounts had a claim to the title of king, nevertheless asserted that claim on two occasions only: first, before Pilate at the time of his passion, when, as he declared to his disciples the judgment of the world commenced. *Now is the judgment of this world.* Secondly, in the description he has given us of the last judgment, in St. Matthew, in which he speaks of himself under no other title than that of king; because he will then exercise to its full extent that jurisdiction which his Father has given him over all mankind. *Then shall the king say unto them at his right hand.*

Judgment is peculiarly the work of monarchs; and never does the majesty of a king appear more august than when he sits on his tribunal, administering justice. Doubly venerable is the sovereign who to the splendor of a crown adds the irradiation of superior wisdom; the sovereign who is able to discern the character of his subjects, and to weigh their merits in a just balance; who to vice apportions punishment, whilst his rewards are bestowed on virtue; who is not only the avenger of open injustice and violence, but the reformer of even the administration of justice, the corrector of reigning abuses, and the re-establisher of order; who, admitting every one to his presence, lends an attentive ear to the supplications of the poor, and to the complaints of private individuals, and thereby restrains judges and magistrates from violating their duty; the sovereign, in short, who finding himself above all, has nothing more at heart than to be equitable towards all. What can represent more faithfully on earth the judgment of God; what can be a more visible image of his justice?

But if it be the work of kings to judge their people, it belongs not less to the Almighty to execute judgment on kings; and it is the distinguishing mark of his supreme authority, that he alone is judge of all the sovereigns of the world. In various parts of scripture, he expressly shews us that if his judgment is dreadful to all conditions

of men, it is so more particularly to the great: *He is terrible to the kings of the earth.*

Of this judgment, to which both kings and people will be summoned, I am now about to speak. St Paul in discoursing on this subject, expressed himself with such energy, that the infidels and heathens before whom he spake were moved, agitated, and alarmed: *As he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled.* I have neither the zeal nor the eloquence of St. Paul, yet unworthy as I am, I hope that, preaching before christians, my ministry may be attended with still greater success: for this end let us implore the illumination of the Holy Spirit.

Of all the expressions employed by the fathers of the church to give us an idea of the justice of God, there is none which appears to me more beautiful, more solid, more replete with sound understanding, than that of Tertullian, and which cannot be thought of too frequently; namely, that God is merciful from his own character, and that he is just from ours. Although my subject is almost inexhaustible, I shall confine myself to this thought, as it will suffice to shew you the adorable, but fearful nature of the judgment of God. I wish to prove to you that the source of this justice is in ourselves; that if God is severe in his judgments,

that severity proceeds from our own conduct; in a word, that when he brings us to judgment, he will judge us by ourselves.

In order to establish this proposition, I observe that there are in us two things which have a necessary connection with the judgment of God; the one is our *faith*, the other our *reason*. As christians we possess faith, and as men we are endued with reason. Faith is a supernatural light which we receive from God; reason is that light which we all bring into the world at our birth: by these two rules, which are to direct the whole of our life, by these two sorts of light and knowledge, we shall be judged: as christians, God will judge us by our faith; as men, he will judge us by our reason; if therefore he is, in his judgment, led to severity, his severity will arise solely from these two principles.

The severity of God's judgment founded on the FAITH of the christian:—this is my *first* division. The severity of God's judgment founded on the REASON of the libertine:—this is my second division.

PART I.

I. The zeal which has been manifested by Pagans for their false religion, compared with the

indifference and coldness of christians in the service and worship of the true God, will be considered at the last judgment; and thus the professor of true religion will be judged by heathens.

If then the pagans, with all their superstition, will rise up in judgment against us at the tribunal of divine justice, how much have we to fear from our own faith! The religion of the pagans and idolaters will serve at most but as an addition to our condemnation; our own religion, that, I mean, which we profess, will be the principal consideration. Let me entreat your attention to the important truth I am desirous of enforcing. Our God will judge us by our religion, whether we have preserved, or whether we have secretly or openly renounced and abandoned it; whether we have constantly and sincerely adhered to its doctrines, or whether we have ceased to believe them. This assertion you may think involves a contradiction; for if we no longer believe the truths of christianity, how can it be called our faith? And if it is not our faith, how can we be judged by it? I shall undertake to obviate this difficulty in such a manner, that instead of weakening my assertion, it will be one of the most solid evidences of its truth.

Let us first make the supposition most favourable to our piety. We all profess to be christians,

and since we make that profession, let us suppose that in our hearts we have the faith which we outwardly acknowledge, and of which we give exterior testimony. Granting then the sincerity of our belief, I say that the Almighty will judge us by what we believe. Have we any plea for objecting to this rule of judgment?

God will judge us by our faith, because it is our faith which will accuse us before him; because it is our faith which will become a witness against us; because it is our faith itself, which, if we become the unhappy subjects of condemnation, will dictate our final sentence.

Yes, my brethren, our faith will *accuse* us before God. The declaration of Jesus Christ on this subject is unequivocal. *Do not think*, said he to the Jews, *that I will accuse you to the father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust.* By Moses he meant not the person of Moses, but his law, the writings which he had left; in a word, the religion which the Jews professed, and which had been taught them by Moses; as if our Saviour had said, this law, this religion, these writings of Moses will rise up against you at the day of judgment. These words, christians, are true in an additional sense when applied to us; for besides the books of Moses, which we possess in common with the Jews, we have a

gospel peculiar to ourselves; and if we pay due attention to that gospel, we shall find that it is a perpetual accusation of our conduct in various particulars of which neither Moses nor the prophets have spoken. We must therefore expect to meet with accusations far more powerful and urgent than those brought against the Jews; because our religion, containing in addition to the jewish doctrines all the truths of the gospel; is far more ample, more illustrated, more holy, more perfect than that of the Jews, and consequently will render us liable to many reproaches from which they are exempt.

St. Paul, in that admirable passage in the epistle to the Romans, in which he speaks of *the day when God shall judge the secrets of men*, represents a conflict in the human mind: *their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another.* These conflicting thoughts will, at the last judgment, divide the mind of the dejected sinner, between his conscience and his faith. His faith will say, thus hast thou believed; his conscience will say, thus hast thou acted; and the opposition of these thoughts will form against him an unanswerable accusation. His faith will protest against his corrupt conscience, and his corrupt conscience will endeavour to defend itself against his faith; till at length the law, triumphing over the vain

efforts of conscience, will convince, alarm, and everwhelm him.

Hence, christians, I repeat, that the *first witness* which will appear against us at the day of judgment, is our *faith*. To impress upon your minds this important truth, I observe farther, that there will be this difference between the righteous and the wicked: the faith of the righteous will give evidence for evidence, that of the wicked will give evidence against evidence; for it is certain that the righteous will evince before God, an honourable testimony to their faith, which will be the reward for that testimony they have borne to their faith, before men. As they have glorified their faith in the sight of men, by a life of holiness, so will their faith glorify them in the sight of God, by the justification of their actions. On the contrary, the wicked having dishonoured their faith by a sensual, corrupt life, their faith will put them to shame, by obliging them to view their conduct in its just light: for, whilst the Almighty, by his reproaches, is overwhelming them, their faith likewise, as an incorruptible witness, will say,—it is true, thou hast believed in the existence of a God, but thou hast not sincerely sought after him, nor laboured to please him: as a christian, thou hast professedly renounced the world, yet thou hast not ceased to be its slave. Thou hast detested the idols of the gentiles, idols

of wood and stone, but thou hast nevertheless made unto thyself idols of flesh.

Is this evidence all that sinners have to apprehend from their faith? No, my brethren: after having borne testimony against them, *their faith itself will pronounce their sentence of condemnation;* will pronounce it in the terms already so often employed in the scriptures. What, in fact, is repeated more frequently in the new testament than those anathemas pronounced by Jesus Christ on unworthy christians; and what are those anathemas but predictions of the reprobation of sinners? When we read in the discourses of Jesus; —*Woe unto the world because of offences! Woe unto you hypocrites! Woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation:*— When we read these woes denounced against the sensual and voluptuous, who pant after nothing but pleasure; to the rich and proud, who are insensible to the miseries of the poor; to the hypocrites, the worldly wise, whose popularity is in appearance only; to the licentious, who by their pernicious example cause the souls of their brethren to perish; when Jesus Christ pronounced these woes, do we not receive his words as the oracles of our religion? Those oracles will be changed into decrees, immutable decrees, at the last judgment. The Son of God will only unfold them, and then make the application. The words,

Woe unto you that are rich, will be as effectual in the condemnation of the avaricious man, as the dreadful sentence, *depart from me, ye cursed.* We find, therefore, that the judgment of them who profess christianity will arise out of their religion.

And this, my dear hearers, explains the meaning of that assertion of St. John, which at first appears so paradoxical: *he that believeth shall not be judged.** He does not intend to teach us that the believer is privileged, by an exemption, from the necessity of appearing at the last day, before the tribunal of Jesus Christ, but merely that the believer will not be judged, because his faith will have led him to pronounce judgment on himself, and thereby render it needless that he should be judged by another: for, either he will have lived conformably to his religion, in which case his religion alone will justify him; or else his life will have been inconsistent with his faith, and then his faith alone will condemn him: so that it will not be requisite, if I may so speak, for Jesus Christ to pass judgment on him, because he will find him already judged. All the jurisdiction which the Son of God will then exer-

* John v. 24.—The author has followed several translations which thus render the words:—*Qui credit in eum, non judicatur.—In judicium non venit.* Ed.

cise over us, as sovereign judge, will be to confirm the secret judgment of our faith, and to render it public.

Ah! christians, how affecting, how awful the thought; by my religion I shall be judged! by that religion which is so holy, so pure, so irreprehensible; that religion which is so inimical to self-love, so contrary to the desires of my heart, so opposed to the spirit of the world by which I am influenced; that religion, whose maxims are as severe as the judgments of the Almighty, or rather, whose maxims are in reality no other than the decrees of the Almighty: by that religion will God decide my eternal destiny; on the principles of my faith will the examination of my life be made; nor shall I be suffered to rest my defence on any other grounds, nor to require that my actions shall be weighed in any other balance. Whatever plea I may alledge, God will still re-call me to the precepts of my faith, on every one of which I shall be obliged to render a strict account; and since the cross of Christ is the abstract of all the truths of my faith, that cross, the august and venerable sign of the son of man, will appear in transcendant brightness, to be the rule of judgment, as it began to be when raised on Calvary, for me, and for the whole world. *Then shall appear the sign of the son of man in heaven.* The cross will be presented to me; and all within me that bears

not the character and the seal of the cross, will be rejected by the Almighty. Ah! my God, wilt thou then employ for my destruction even the instrument of my salvation; and will that which of all I possess is most holy, even my religion, bear testimony against me?

Yes, christians, all this we ought to fear, and to avoid with the most anxious care: this danger should make us tremble in the expectation of the awful judgment of God. In this life it engages not our thoughts, or we think of it with little interest. Considering the truths of religion but superficially, we are scarcely aware of their consequences. The maxims of the gospel inculcate on us the narrow way of salvation, the necessity of penitence, the indispensable obligation to mortify our flesh and crucify its vices: all these maxims we hear with apparent respect, and sometimes pompously repeat to others; but when we are required to put them in practice, we seem no longer to comprehend them: yet when Jesus Christ shall appear in all the brightness of his majesty, and all the weight of his authority, to impress our minds with these important truths, and by applying them to our actions, shall shew us the glaring contradiction of faith and morals which has pervaded our lives; when he shall compare those principles of detachment from our own interest, and of self-denial, with our injustice, our revenge,

our sensuality, our luxuriousness, and our unceasing attention to self; then alas! we shall find that *it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God;* of that God who is not only the author and finisher, but the protector and avenger of our faith.

That faith is now weak, if not almost annihilated in our hearts; and the son of man expresses a doubt whether, when he appears at the end of the world, *he shall find faith on the earth?* Yes, christians, he will find faith, at least he will find sufficient to judge and condemn us. Dead and entombed as it almost appears in our hearts, it will rise again; for one of the miracles which will be wrought by Jesus Christ, who is *the resurrection and the life,* will be when our bodies are raised to life, to revive our faith within our souls. Our faith thus raised again, thus re-animated by the presence of Jesus Christ, will appeal to his justice. Against whom my brethren? Not against those tyrants by whom it has been persecuted; for it will glory in their persecutions; not against the heathens by whom it has been denied; their infidelity, in a certain degree, palliates their guilt: but against us, justice will be demanded for all the outrages we have committed on our faith; for having suffered it to languish in the useless inactivity of our worldly lives, rendering it inactive in the cause of God, and barren of good works; for

having held it captive whilst, with stubborn insensibility, we passed whole years in a state of sin; for having dishonoured it by actions unworthy of the name we bear, and the character with which we are invested; for having brought it into contempt amongst the enemies of christianity, who would not fail to take every advantage over our faith, and over us: in fine, our faith will appeal against us to divine justice, because, although in itself capable of raising us to the highest degrees of holiness, we have rendered it insufficient to prevent us from falling into the depths of depravity: for these injuries will it demand justice, and justice will be granted.

But if from the irregularity of our conduct, our piety were destroyed within us, and we were fallen into a state of irreligion, the final consequence of vice, would the Almighty then judge us according to our faith? Yes, my dear hearers, God would even then judge us by our faith; and the secret impiety to which we had yielded, far from mitigating, would but increase the severity of his judgment.

It is necessary to establish in our minds a truth to which we have paid too little attention; namely, —that in the judgment of God, there is an infinite difference between an heathen who has never

known the law of christianity, and a christian who after having known, has in his heart renounced it; and consequently that the Almighty, following the rules of his justice, will treat the one far differently from the other. We are certain that a pagan, to whom the law of Jesus Christ has never been announced, will not be judged by that law; that the God of equity will not condemn a man by a law which he has never known: this is expressly taught by St. Paul: *For as many as have sinned without law, shall also perish without law.* But the christian who having professed the law of Jesus Christ, and who afterwards shakes off his yoke; he, having sinned after he had received the christian law, will also perish by that law; and his defection is the first crime that God will lay to his charge; for he was not at liberty to emancipate himself from the obedience due to a law, to which he had bound himself by baptism: after having ratified the engagement by various exercises of christianity, he could not renounce it, even by that inward renunciation of which I am speaking, without apostacy. What then will be the consequence? Observe the fatal end of impiety: the law of Jesus Christ which he has abandoned and renounced, will pursue the delinquent at the judgment of God, as a deserter; and in like manner as a deserter from the army, if re-taken, is treated according to the most rigorous laws of the service he has quitted, so, with still greater justice, the libertine when

brought into the presence of God, as a deserter from his religion, will be judged according to its laws; without being able to defend himself by the pretext, that it was no longer his religion, and that he was no longer acquainted with its laws, since his ignorance being voluntary, would constitute his crime, and not his justification.

I am aware however, of the objections which may be brought by infidelity. I know that even in the profession of our faith, Christ has made us free: I know that religion requires the consent of our will, and that we must desire to be christians, in order to be so in reality: but God does not leave it to our choice or caprice, to receive or reject christianity: after we have embraced it, we are not free to reject such parts as are uncongenial with our views. If then we have been so stubborn, so rash, as to suppress in our hearts our holy faith, we shall be required to render to the Almighty an account of our conduct. Now by what reasons shall we defend it? Can we assert that the proofs of the christian religion appeared to us insufficient? It will be truly surprising that those proofs which have convinced the world have been insufficient for our conviction; that a religion to which the greatest men on earth have become converts, and which they have defended with all the force of their genius, and all the ardour of their minds; a religion which by the evidence of its

miracles has triumphed over all tne errors of paganism; a religion which in its proofs, in its principles, in its morality, in its progress bore all the characters of divinity;—that such a religion should not have had evidence capable of convincing us will, I repeat, appear truly surprising: but without entering into these ideas, God may justly ask whether it is, in reality, our reason which has led us to violate our submission to the law of faith; whether we had examined thoroughly and used every mean of instruction, before we took so perilous, so bold a step; whether we have examined with humility; whether we have examined with a teachable spirit; whether we have examined without prejudice; whether we have examined with a sincere wish to discover the truth; and, above all, whether we have preserved that purity of life, which disposes the mind to receive divine knowledge; for on a subject of such high importance, it was our duty to have omitted nothing which could assist our researches.

On all these points the Almighty will find sufficient cause to confound, and to condemn us. He will convincingly shew, that having never applied ourselves seriously to the study of religion, our infidelity has arisen solely from the criminal ignorance in which we have lived; for it is certain that no class of men are less acquainted with the principles of the gospel, than they who are called the free-

thinkers of the age. God will shew us, that in almost every instance, we have examined the truths of christianity with a spirit of pride, of presumption, of obstinacy, and of self-sufficiency. He will justly reproach us for having thus rebelled against his word, whilst on numberless occasions we have yielded a ready submission to the word of man. He will shew us that in arguing on our religion we were commonly actuated by dishonesty, and an intention of discovering defects which might enable us to subvert its authority: this prepossession alone was sufficient to estrange the Almighty, when he might otherwise have been willing to communicate himself to us: for these things God will put us to confusion.

But that confusion will be complete, when, tracing the source of all our errors, he will force us to acknowledge the real causes of our infidelity; namely, licentiousness of mind, and licentiousness of heart. Licentiousness of mind, which will have constituted us judges of every thing, that we might be subject to no restraint; which will have freed us from our faith, not to propose a better system, but to render us careless what we believed, and what we disbelieved; to abandon all to chance, to reduce us to an unhappy indifference on the subject of religion, or rather, to deprive us of religion altogether. Licentiousness of heart, which, finding the maxims of our faith a grievous restraint, will have

persuaded, and at length determined us to liberate ourselves from that restraint, and to quit our state of obedience. That these were the causes of our irregularities our Judge will prove, by shewing, that whilst our morality was pure our faith remained sound, and that when our faith began to waver, our morals likewise had begun to degenerate.

Again I ask, how shall we answer on all these points? Shall we appeal from our faith to our reason? and can we hope that reason, which according to the principles of theology, is one of the essential foundations of our faith, will serve as our defence against that faith? No, no, my brethren, we must promise ourselves nothing from that source: if our faith condemn us, it will condemn us with the full consent of our reason; for we were warned by reason itself, not to pay too much deference to its suggestions, since it was needful, in the things of God, to seek superior and less fallible instruction; since, however enlightened, reason ought ever to be subordinate to the dictates of revelation, and the authority of God. When we employed our reason in censuring the precepts of our religion, we invested it with a power to which it laid no claim: reason therefore will condemn our apostacy: but on other subjects, will it afford us no support? Ah! christians, how feeble were the support of our reason against the judgment of

God! How great the folly and temerity of a creature who would contend with his Creator! Ah! my God, who am I that I should enter into competition with thee? for one plea which I might argue in favour of my actions, couldest thou not bring forward innumerable arguments to which I could make no reply? These, my brethren, were the sentiments of holy Job; what then ought to be those of the sinner? The libertine, however, believes himself in possesson of a resource; he determines to oppose the Almighty with his reason; and consequently by *reason* he desires to be judged: to that tribunal I shall bring him, in the second part of my discourse.

PART II.

II. It is a doctrine as baneful in effect, as holy in appearance, that since the fall of our first parents reason is become altogether corrupt; and, to assert that when uninfluenced by faith, man has no other guide than error, and passion, tends, under the pretext of humbling him, to render him licentious. Independently of faith, we are endued with the principles of reason, which, even after the commission of sin, asserts its empire. That reason makes us acquainted with our Creator, points out our duties, enjoins laws for our observance, and subjects us to order. Can it then be absolutely and totally depraved? I know that

reason alone, without divine illumination, is insufficient for our salvation; but I mantain that although it is not powerful enough to save, it is sufficient to condemn us. Reason, I acknowledge, is frequently obscured by clouds of passion; yet it is invested with a light which all our passions cannot extinguish, and which through the thickest darkness of sin, illuminates our minds. Whether reason be considered then in its purity and integrity, that is, in the state in which we first received it from God; or whether it be considered in the corrupt state to which we have reduced it by our vices, I repeat, christians, that by it we shall be judged; for God will judge us not only by our natural sense of right and wrong, but even by that natural sense, when weakened by error.

We shall be judged by the pure reason which God has given us:—nothing is more certain, my dear hearers. We openly offend and rebel against that reason: the Almighty will summon it to bear witness against us: we refuse to hear the voice of reason; he will compel us to listen to its remonstrances: we form pretexts to gain over reason to the side of passion; he will destroy all those pretexts, by discovering to us the hidden parts of our minds, which we had resolved not to see. These instances which display different degrees of human pride, will furnish just grounds for the condemnation of the wicked.—Let us pursue the subject.

We sin against all the principles of our reason: this is the first accusation on which we shall be judged. Since your reason, will God say to the libertine, was the most powerful curb to licentiousness, you ought the more scrupulously to have obeyed its laws: in proportion to the freedom with which you rejected the authority of faith, you ought to have been strict and irreprehensible in your compliance with the dictates of reason. Have you thus acted? Has your life been the life of a reasonable being, the life of a *man?* Then will the Almighty bring forward that catalogue of dreadful crimes enumerated by St. Paul in his epistle to the Romans; crimes with which he reproached the heathen philosophers, who by reason had acquired the knowledge of God, yet had *not glorified him as God:*—impurities which nature itself holds in abhorrence; diabolical arts for inventing new means of gratifying the most depraved appetites, and the utmost effrontery in glorying in those arts; acts of the vilest injustice, violence, usurpation, and tyranny, supported by influence and power; the blackest perfidy, denominated worldly intrigue; fierce jealousies fermented by the leaven of detestable ambition; animosity and hatred urged on to fury; evil speaking amounting to the most cruel defamation; avarice leading to the excess of inhumanity; a love of expense carried to unbounded prodigality; luxury causing the total destruction of the body;

violence of temper effecting the derangement of the mind!—But what am I saying? Whither has the subject carried me? Do we then find all these vices in the man who abandons his faith for the guidance of reason? Alas! my brethren, experience too commonly proves that the imputation is not unjust.

In speculation, moral depravity is not the necessary consequence of deserting the faith, but it is, it ever has been so in practice. Whether unbelievers, as a just punishment for their infidelity, are given over by God *to a reprobate mind;* or whether their natural propensities, notwithstanding the suggestions of reason, plunge them into vice, all these enormous crimes will be *laid up in store* with the Almighty, and *sealed up among* the *treasures* of his wrath. He will set them before the eyes of the sinner, and ask with humiliating irony, —Were these abominations the offspring of reason? Was reason the accomplice and the approver of your guilt? Thus will he *mock* the reprobate *when his fear cometh.*

"Ah! my God," exclaimed an ancient writer, stung with remorse on contemplating the awful truth I am enforcing,—"It was the dread of thy judgment, awakened by the judgment of my own reason, which wrought out my salvation, which perfected my conversion, which rescued me from

the deep abyss of iniquity; which brought me back to thee. I strove to free myself from thine authority, and to live without God, but I could not free myself from the influence of reason: whatever sect I embraced, whatever system I adopted, I was still sensible of my criminality. In the midst of the amusements, the pleasures, and delights of the world, the presence of reason interrupted my tranquillity; in all places and at all times it opposed me as a formidable adversary: hence I learned to fear thy justice; for if, I argued, I cannot avoid the reproaches of my own reason, which is weak and imperfect, how shall I avoid the reproaches of my God? How shall I avoid the rigour of his judgment?"—This, my dear hearers, is a representation of what is daily passing in our minds when we commit sin with a clear view of its malignity; and the strong opposition of reason to our passions, to our lusts, is the commencement, or, if I may so speak, the adumbration of the judgment of God.

Again: in numberless instances in which the voice of reason is heard, though less powerfully and distinctly, we refuse to listen to its censures; and because its determinations would frequently oppose our designs and enterprises, we stifle its suggestions, and weaken them till they can scarcely penetrate our hearts; but it will not be thus at the last judgment; the Almighty will then com-

pel us to hear the voice of reason, or in other words, the state to which we are reduced will but two powerfully compel us to hear that voice. We are now rendered deaf to reason by the tumult of passion within, and the objects presented by the senses without; that is to say, the confusion clamour, and pomp of the world by which our minds are dissipated; falsehood, imposture, and adulation, by which we are seduced. These things will no longer exist when God shall bring us to judgment. Terrestrial objects will not arrest our attention, for the *fashion of this world* will have *passed away*. We shall no longer be swayed by our passions, for death will have destroyed their power, and no one will then be interested in our deception. Abandoned by every created being, and left to solitary reflection, we shall find the voice of reason too powerful to be unheard. Instead of those agreeable, those flattering falsehoods which we had resolved to credit, reason will utter grievous and humiliating truths, which we had never known, because we had been unwilling to hear them. It will shew us that the qualities we had imagined shining excellencies, were, in reality, defects; defects of the most criminal nature: and what will be our surprise, should we be condemned for those very things which have here obtained such warm congratulation and applause!

Lastly: on those occasions in which the disguise and artifice, not to say the hypocrisy of self-love is so common, we seek pretences to engage reason itself in the cause of passion. At the day of judgment, the Almighty, who penetrates the inmost recesses of the heart, *(for the word of God,* says the Apostle, *is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart:)* —At the day of judgment the Almighty will separate reason from passion; he will distinguish pure intentions from vain pretences, appearances from real effects, illusion from truth; and rendering us reasonable against our own inclination, he will compel us to acknowledge that our hearts had been filled with insincerity and iniquity. Behold, he will say, illuminating our minds with a ray of divine light, behold the motives of your conduct. On that occasion you were actuated by malignant envy coloured with the specious pretence of zeal: on another by revenge, disguised under an appearance of justice: you were kind and charitable, but your kindness, your charity, were exerted merely for the furtherance of your selfish aims: your actions were edifying, but in edifying others, you were seeking your own advantage, and that alone.

Alas! christians, how great the number of hypocrites who will be unmasked at the tribunal of God! How innumerable the imaginary and specious virtues which will involve their possessors in deeper disgrace, than even their vices sincerely acknowledged! How various the pretended merits which will have received all their recompense in this world, and in the world to come will meet with eternal condemnation!

But after all, if our reason should have been erroneous, if the errors of our reason should have led us into sin, how will God then employ it in our condemnation? I will endeavour, my brethren, so to answer this question, that nothing may appear doubtful on so important a subject.—God will even in the case I have supposed, be authorized to judge us by our reason, not considered as altogether misguided, but misguided on certain points, whilst on others it is clear; misguided at certain periods of our life, whilst at others it is enlightened.

Our reason is enlightened on various important subjects, and at certain periods, even on the subject of salvation. In those instances, in which neither your interest, your ambition, nor your pleasure is concerned, how great is your penetration; how unerring your judgment! You can then discern what is right, and what is wrong; what is reason-

able, and what is unreasonable; what ought to be received, and what ought to be rejected; what is worthy of approbation, and what is deserving of censure: your counsels are then dictated by wisdom, your actions guided by justice. How vain then the plea,—I was in an error,—to justify you in the sight of God! Your error proceeded from your will; you were deceived because your interest, your ambition, your love of pleasure made you wish to be deceived. Whenever your own interest was not at stake, you could clearly distinguish truth from falsehood: you boasted of your talents, (talents which you certainly possessed,) for tracing the motive of every action, and shewing its equity or injustice. Whenever your ambition found no excitement, you were influenced by natural probity, and abhorred those improper actions, those clandestine practices which counteracted, not only the principles of religion, but the feelings of humanity, and the maxims of society. When your passions were silent, when you were not in pursuit of inordinate pleasures, your sentence against vice was inflexibly severe. Whence this diversity, this contrariety of sentiments? Why did you not think on one occasion, as you had thought on another? Why were you not at one period, what you were at a former period?

Draw near, will the Almighty say, and appear before me in the original simplicity of your cha-

racter. I seek not the evidence of your faith; that of your reason is sufficient. Where is that reason with which you were endued? Before it was blinded by passion, what were its dictates? By what dark clouds have you obscured its light? Since you have rejected reason as a guide, it shall now appear against you as a witness, and a judge.

These are the circumstances, my dear hearers, in the judgment of God, which strike me with the deepest awe, and appear most worthy to be enforced. All the antecedent signs mentioned in our text, are less impressive to my mind, than the thought of being judged by God according to my reason, and according to my faith.

Christians, shall I, as the minister of God, cite you before that dread tribunal at which all your worldly greatness will be annihilated? Heaven forbid that I should ever become your accuser. I appeal not then to the Almighty, my brethren, but to yourselves, to your faith, to your reason. Against your own feelings be just to yourselves, or rather, be just to God.

After you have judged yourselves, I might still say to you, that the final decision is not made; that however favourable your own judgment may be, you ought to apprehend the judgment of God, since St. Paul, that great apostle, did not consider

himself fully justified because he was exempted from the reproaches of conscience. But I shall not urge this point. I only require you to gain from yourselves a just testimony in your own favour. This testimony, my brethren, you will never obtain, whilst you live in the indulgence of sin. You may for a time turn away your eyes from the contemplation of yourselves, and avoid the sight of your own characters; but death and the last judgment will arrive; you will then be forced to endure the sight of yourselves; that sight will be, both at your dying hour, and after death, your torment. The view of an angry God will be truly awful; but the view most tremendous will be that of your own hearts: therefore has the Almighty threatened the sinner with the recollection of the sins of his life. *I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes.*

In this world do you not above all things avoid the sight of yourselves? You are displeased when urged to self-contemplation; and your anger would be kindled against me if I placed before you too faithful a portrait of yourselves:—a proof that you cannot endure the sight of the disorder and corruption of your own hearts.

But let us my brethren, however painful and repugnant to our feelings, resolve to addict our-

selves to the contemplation of our real characters; for we must regard ourselves with disapprobation if we would gain the approbation of God: in viewing ourselves we should become hateful in our own eyes, and thus humbling ourselves, we should obtain the favour of the Almighty. We are ignorant of our faults; we therefore regard ourselves with complacency, and are under the divine displeasure: but at the last judgment, we shall behold our own hearts, and with this aggravation of our misery, that we behold them too late; that we are become at once objects of hatred to ourselves, and to that God who will pronounce our eternal condemnation.

Woe be unto us if we are insensible to those truths, which in all ages have caused good men to tremble!—Men who assuredly were not inferior to us in energy of mind, and clearness of understanding. From this time, my dear hearers, let us fear the judgment of the Almighty; and to render that fear useful, let us enter into judgment with ourselves, before we are called to the tribunal of our God. Let us submit to the authority of faith, that it may not rise up against us. Let us resign ourselves to the guidance of reason; let us agree with that *adversary quickly, whilst we are in the way; lest he deliver us to the judge*, from whom no mercy will be obtained. By a free and voluntary self examination, let us anticipate that view which

we shall one day be compelled to take of our own characters.

Suffer me, O ! Lord, to offer unto thee one petition, which though rash and presumptuous in appearance, arises from the view thou hast placed before me, of thy judgment at the last day. The only favour I implore on that great day is, that thou wilt defend me against myself. As for thee, my God, I will dare to acknowledge that my fear of thee is but the result of the fear I entertain of myself. All I behold in thee inspires me with confidence, for I behold nothing but goodness and mercy: but thy goodness is essentially adverse to sin; and though still goodness, it is justice, it is vengeance when opposed to iniquity : feeling myself sinful, I have reason to dread even thy goodness itself !

Possibly there are in this assembly men who are yet unimpressed by these great truths; but in thy hand O ! God, are all hearts, for thou art their Creator; thy grace can arouse them from the deep sleep into which they are fallen : by a salutary alarm thou canst effect their conversion, and restore them to the path of eternal felicity.

FINIS.

[*B. Flower, Printer, Harlow.*]

Date Due

APR 23'52			

Div.S. 252.02 B768S 551458
Bourdaloue

Select sermons tr. from
the original French of...

Div.S. 252.02 B768S 551458

Duke University Libraries
D00561468U

D00561468U
DUKE-LSC